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GOLDEN FETTERS BY MARK LEMON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Be merry, man! and tak not sair in mind
The wavering of this wretched world of sorrow;
To God be humble, to thy friend be kind,
And with thy neighbour gladly lend and borrow;
His chance to-night, it may be thine to-morrow!

DUNBAR.

GOLDEN FETTERS.

BY

MARK LEMON,

AUTHOR OF "WAIT FOR THE END," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

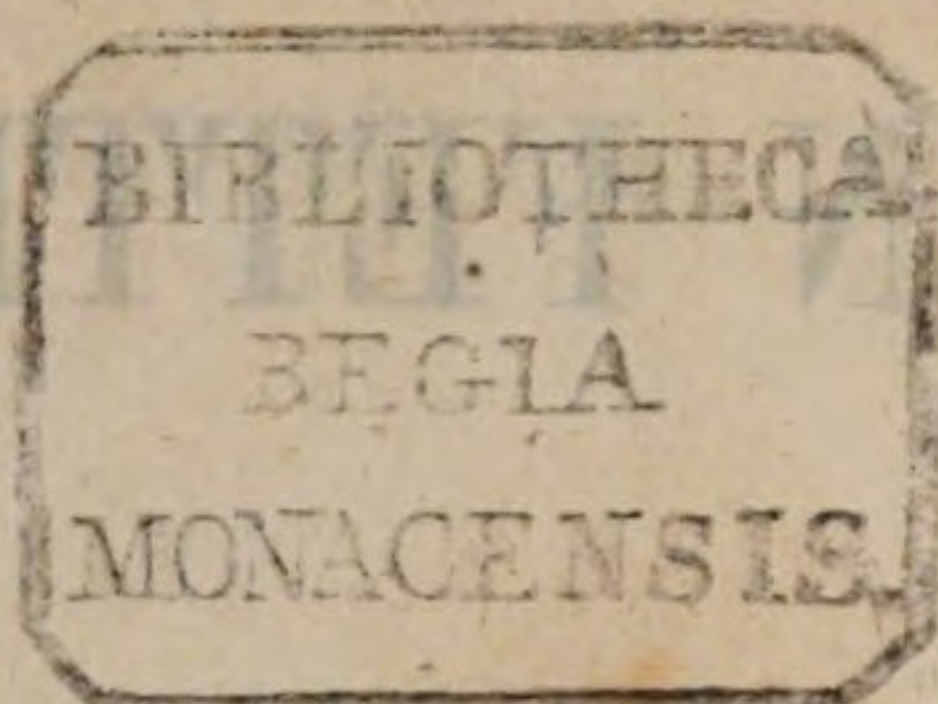
VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1868.

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MARK LEMON.

TO THE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

FROM THE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

AND FELLOW WORKERS ON PUNCH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

With Illustrations

PRINTED

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1888

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GOLDEN FETTERS

To CHAPTER I

My very good Friends
and Fellow-workers on Punch,
THESE:

Mark Lemon.

GOLDEN LETTERS

To CHAPTER I

It was a rainy morning towards the end of April, and Mr. Oswald was sitting at his table with his only son Oswald — a fine boy of nine or ten — in the great entrance hall of his handsome villa at Rapport. The wicket was a large volume bound in green paper, the bat was of juvenile dimensions, and the ball, although soft to the touch, was so hard that it would have done any amount of mischief to the head of a man. The boy was looking at the wicket with a look of intense interest, and was about to pick it up, when his father called to him. "What is it, my son?"

"It was your papa's fault, dear," said Mr. Oswald, "for letting you play here in the hall and not in the garden. You got stuck up for your cricket." Mr. Oswald's knowledge of the noble game was very limited, and the word "wicket" was new to him. "I don't know," he said, "I got it out of the box."

GOLDEN FETTERS.

CHAPTER I.

It was a rainy morning towards the end of April, and Mr. Barnard was playing cricket with his only son Oswald — a fine boy of nine or ten — in the great entrance hall of his handsome villa at Clapton. The wicket was a large volume bound in green baize, the bat was of juvenile dimensions, and the ball sufficiently soft to do no damage to the marbled walls, but quite hard enough to inflict a smart rap on the cheek of Mrs. Barnard, then passing from the breakfast-parlour to her store room.

"Beg pardon, ma," cried Oswald, in reply to the shriek of Mrs. Barnard. "Wasn't it a good drive, though!"

"It was your papa's fault, dear," said Mrs Barnard, "for letting you play here in the hall, and — whatever have you got stuck up for your crickets." Mrs. Barnard's knowledge of the noble game was very limited, and she meant "wickets."

"I don't know; I got it out of the boot closet," replied Oswald.

"Why, as I live," exclaimed Mrs. Barnard, mak-

ing a closer inspection, "if it isn't the Family Bible! Why, Barnard, how could you be so wicked?"

"I never gave it a thought, my dear," said Barnard, "or, of course, you know ——"

"I've not seen that book since we came to Clapton, and I've often wondered where it had got to. Oswald, take it to the breakfast-room, there's a dear child; your papa ought to have known better."

"But I tell you, my dear, I didn't give it a thought," said Barnard. "I know it now, well enough, because your father made me write our names in it the day we were married."

This was said as Oswald, like a dutiful son, carried the ill-used volume on his head to the breakfast-room.

The book was very dusty and cobwebby, and it is due to Mrs. Barnard to say that she felt a kind of qualm as she removed those evidences of neglect, for a time had been when she had sat at her father's table, and listened with reverence to her parent's voice reading the word of God. There had been other listeners then, some of whom had passed away to their graves, and others who had become as much separated as though death had divided them from each other.

Mrs. Barnard opened the old book and read the genealogy of the last generation of her family. There were the names of two brothers and a sister who had died in infancy, or early childhood, and then came

"Louisa, born January 1st, 1796; baptised at Hartsden, in the parish of Hartslye."

"Married Joseph Barnard, of Russell Square, London, August 10th, 1826."

Yes, Louisa had hung on hand until the mature age of thirty, and Mr. Barnard, Wine Merchant of London, was thought to have deserved the ten thousand pounds received as dowry when he drove her away from the pleasant domain of Hartsden for "better or worse." Certainly Mrs. Barnard had not been an obedient daughter, neither had she been distinguished as an affectionate sister; so there was much honest sincerity in the rejoicings at Hartsden when Miss Deering was married. The entries in the old book, which we have transcribed, provoked one or two exclamations from Mr. Barnard before he said,

"Dear me! You will be forty-two, Louisa, next birthday, and we have been married twelve years! I thought it had been longer — much longer — until I reflected."

Mrs. Barnard either affected not to hear her husband's remarks, or her attention was occupied by the next entry in the old book. It was this:

"Omitted. Ralph, born April 30th, 1788; baptised at Hartsden in the parish of Hartslye."

Mrs. Barnard rested her chin upon her clenched hand, and muttered:

"I'd quite forgotten his birthday — quite. Why, it's ten years since we have spoken to each other."

"What say, dear?" said Mr. Barnard.

"Did I speak?" asked Mrs. Barnard.

"Yes, my dear; at least I thought so."

"Very likely. I had just read my brother Ralph's name, and seen that his birthday is next Tuesday. I'd quite forgotten it."

"And quite right, my dear, after the manner he behaved about that silver tea-pot," said Mr. Barnard. "It was not the value of the thing — we could buy a dozen tea-pots if it came to that — but having been as good as left to you by your mother, who ——"

"Had no right, perhaps, to have made me the promise — but that had nothing to do with it."

"Certainly not, certainly not. If you wanted the tea-pot, being — being the only daughter, a gentleman would have said 'take it,' though he would have had to buy another for himself," said Mr. Barnard.

"He never was a gentleman, although my brother!" replied Mrs. Barnard, as though her patent of gentility was apparent to every one. "He was always fond of low society — tenant farmers, and huntsmen, and keepers, — never taking his place among the gentry as he might have done, considering the extent of my father's property."

"I fancy the 'knock 'em down' would have prevented that. County families are so particular," remarked Mr. Barnard.

"Knock 'em down, sir?" repeated Mrs. Barnard. "If you mean by that that my father's land agencies made him less respectable ——"

"Not for a moment, my dear, not for a moment," said Barnard, with earnestness. "We know better than that. He was as good as a banker to half the

landed gentry in the county, and could have sold up the other half, had he foreclosed their mortgages. But Ralph was low — had no ambition."

"None, or he would never have married that red-faced, vulgar thing, Margaret Bodgers, who must needs set her heart upon our family plate," said Mrs. Barnard, savagely.

"An upstart! Yes, that's the word," replied her husband, adding, after a pause, "She had some three hundred acres of land, hadn't she?"

"Oh, so they said," answered Mrs. Barnard, "but I don't believe it."

Why Mrs. Barnard should have had any doubt of the fact is a mystery, as the possession by Margaret's father of five hundred broad acres adjoining Hartsden (and she was an only child) had frequently been urged, at family councils of the Deerings, as a reason — the only one, alas! — why Ralph Deering should make Margaret his wife.

As Mr. Barnard had no object or desire to continue the conversation in the direction it had taken, he proposed, more as a divarication than from any real desire for the insertion, that he should add Oswald's name to the list in the old Bible.

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnard. "No! not next to that unworthy brother!"

"Of course not — of course not," replied Mr. B. "Let's see; your father don't appear to have been buried. — No, — I'll inter him, my dear, if you'll give me the particulars."

Mrs. Barnard appeared to be suddenly lost in thought, and her husband did not care to interrupt

her. Neither was she roused by a crash in the greenhouse, whither Master Oswald had retired in pursuit of certain strawberries ripening in pots, and destined by Mrs. Barnard to appear at a forthcoming dinner party given principally to mortify some guests who had no greenhouse.

Mr. Barnard had suspected the cause of the noise, and went out of the room. When he returned oppressed by the knowledge that his delinquent Oswald had devoured every berry of the early strawberries, he was surprised to find that Mrs. Barnard had been crying — a weakness which did not often afflict her.

“What’s the matter, Louisa?” asked the surprised husband. “Something in your eye?”

“No — I have been thinking — I had not thought of my father for so long until to-day, that when you spoke of him so unfeelingly ——”

“No, my dear Louisa, not unfeelingly.”

“You didn’t mean it to be so, I dare say; but it came unexpectedly — I mean about his burial — that when I remembered that he was dead and — it brought back old times, and many acts of kindness — that’s all.”

“Well, and nothing to be ashamed of, my dear,” said Mr. Barnard, soothingly; “we have all our moments of weakness, and that sort of thing — you less than most women — but ——”

“And I’ll tell you what I’ve been thinking of also; it has come like a flash upon me — like an inspiration, I may say, — through talking of father and the family.”

"What is it, my dear?" asked Barnard, sitting down opposite his wife and folding his hands upon the table, to bespeak, as it were, his extreme attention to her revelation.

"I've been thinking," said Mrs. Barnard, speaking slowly, and pausing between her words, "I have a great mind to try and make it up with my brother Ralph."

Mr. Barnard fairly started. "Make it up with him? Make it up after all ——"

"Yes, — after all his bad conduct to me," said Mrs. B., calmly. "He is my only brother, and I am his only sister."

"Yes — that's true — quite true!"

"He has been a widower now for more than ten years, and therefore is not likely to marry again. He has no child, and though he lost a mint of money in some mining scheme, he is still a rich man."

"You are right, my dear," observed Mr. Barnard, catching a glimpse of his clever wife's meaning.

"Now, you are moderately well off, and will be better, I hope, before you die, but Oswald can't have too much," — she paused, — "and then, Barnard, you have not any family to fall back upon, whereas Hartsden has been ours for more than a hundred years, and Oswald shall have the education of a gentleman ——"

"My dear Louisa, you really are — well, be angry if you will, — but you really are a d—— clever woman. You see so far ahead, so — what shall I say? — out of your own sphere. I am well

off, business prosperous — wine trade always is if you know your business, and I flatter myself I do know mine, — but, as you justly say, Oswald can't be too rich, and Hartsden carries a what's-its-name with it. He might change his name if it came to that."

"A good idea, to be remembered at a proper time," said Mrs. Barnard. "Next Tuesday is Ralph's birthday, — I will make that the excuse for writing to him."

"Clever again! Deuced clever!"

"And — yes — and you had better write Oswald's name in the old Bible," adding, after a pause, "you may say Oswald Ralph."

"But that is not the darling's name," observed Mr. Barnard.

"It ought to have been, my dear," replied the politic wife; "and when it has served its purpose it can be easily erased."

Mr. Barnard having made the entry — lying in the Book of Truth — and the rain having ceased, he put on a light overcoat, and, umbrella in hand, went forth to the City delighted at the prospect of the family reconciliation, which promised to bring such substantial advantages to his darling Oswald.

Mr. Barnard abroad, and Mr. Barnard at home, was quite a different person. Mr. Barnard abroad was really somebody. When he assumed his reserved seat (play or pay) in the express morning omnibus, every eye was waiting to catch his, and every lip ready to smirk a recognition. There was a gracious condescension in the manner of Mr. Barnard that

was duly valued by his acquaintance, although it would have been difficult to have defined any reason why this acknowledgment of superiority should have been admitted. Mr. Barnard was not so very rich, nor so extensively engaged in commerce, nor so very high up in the Corporation, as to command the deference of his fellow omnibusians, but Mr. Barnard, from a consciousness of his own merits, perhaps, assumed a superiority and found it readily conceded to him. Mr. Barnard was a great politician, and he spoke so authoritatively on all matters of state at home and abroad, that he might have been supposed to have kept in his pay a first Lord of the Treasury, and been proprietor of a private Foreign Office. His "best information" and "highest authority" often proved absurdly wrong, but Mr. B. was never abashed, and complacently told his opponents "to wait a little and then they would see," as though they were puppies, and required nine days before their eyes opened.

The only assignable cause for this deference was, possibly, the connection of Mr. Barnard's name with certain rumours which cropped up at intervals as to some dormant baronetcy, and which he always affected to disregard and laugh at.

In Gog Lane, in the City, where his offices were, Mr. Barnard appeared to most advantage; either from the narrowness of the Lane, which contrasted strongly with the consequential strut and general inflation of the merchant, or the bristling shirt frill which Mr. Barnard always released from the bondage of his waistcoat as he approached the

door of his office. A junior clerk was always on the watch for his arrival, in order to throw open the door and admit King Corkscrew (as Mr. B. was called on 'Change) into his City dominions. Seated in a large morocco chair, Mr. Barnard gave audience to his chief clerk and his confidential cellarman. To do Mr. Barnard justice he was a first-rate man of business, and no financial blunder escaped him, so that his clerks gave him but little trouble, being most careful to be accurate and punctual.

His cellarman knew, also, that Mr. Barnard had a true and discriminating palate. In preparing the various combinations of liquids which go forth to the world as "fine old crusted," "old and dry," "sound and fruity," "choice and nutty," or by the other names they received at their mixing, Mr. Cellarman knew that the utmost discrimination must be exercised, or his computations would be rejected with scorn and vituperation.

Mr. Barnard possibly carried matters with a high hand when abroad, to compensate himself for the very small figure he was allowed to make at home. Mrs. Barnard was, and always had been, of a very bad temper, as well as of a selfish, unloving nature; consequently, in the absence of all refinement from education and association, Mr. Barnard did not sleep upon a bed

"Whose roughest part
Was but the crumpling of the roses."

He made a fair struggle for the maintenance of his marital supremacy during the first year and a

half of his marriage, but yielded in the few months which preceded the birth of Oswald.

That young gentleman was at first employed, very shamefully, to effect the utter subjugation of his papa; but as Oswald grew in years, his mamma, giving way too much to the promptings of her maternal feelings, became in her turn the slave of her offspring. Mr. Barnard, therefore, maintained the best relations with his son, who, being a 'cute child, discovered very soon the extent of his power, and exercised it to the banishment of all tutors, until at ten years old he could scarcely read Mother Hubbard. He had other acquirements, however, which in some way compensated — so his parents said — for his backwardness in book learning. He could play at cricket, as we have seen, and he could toss off a glass of his papa's peculiar port with a facility that was surprising. Oswald grew to be fond of wine, and was more than once detected by the footman helping himself on the sly. Poor little fellow! he was learning in a bad school, although a pleasant one.

With the servants Oswald was more or less popular, according to their degree. The men in the stables and the house liked young master, and did not hesitate to take tips from the boy, or even to flatter him into giving them. To the women servants he was a kind of terror, playing them all manner of uncomfortable tricks, and very often making mischief between them and their mistress. Oswald was what the monkey is in that zoological paradise called "The Happy Family," he kept the household from going

to sleep or becoming lethargic from an excess of peacefulness.

To his mother's maid, Scott (who had been engaged at first as a nursery governess, but had given up her pupil in despair), Oswald was generally civil and amenable. The girl's good looks might possibly have had an influence over him; and it is among the privileges of a pretty face to touch even the very young. Oswald was always very good with Scott, until he discovered that she walked out now and then with a young carpenter who had just started in business at Clapton, and who did the odd work at the villa. The little fellow turned very sulky for some days after making this discovery, but Scott contrived to coax him into a good humour again, and certainly kept the carpenter out of sight round the corner whenever she went sweethearting.

Scott was not only lady's maid to Mrs. Barnard, she was something more — she was her mistress's confidant. Like most women who have been reared out of good society, Mrs. Barnard made more private communications to her maid than was compatible with their social relation to each other. Mrs. Barnard had no friends, although she boasted of many acquaintances, as Barnard had a great objection to *tête-à-tête* dinners, and was, moreover, of a hospitable disposition. His invitations were always acceptable, as the *cuisine* was well managed, the *menu* judiciously arranged, and the wines at his own table were always unexceptionable, whatever might have been the character of those forwarded from Gog Lane to his customers.

Mrs. Barnard found the concoction of a letter to her long-neglected brother by no means an easy task, after she had written "Falernian Villa, Clapton," and added the date. It required some minutes' reflection before she could write "My dear Brother," and then she wrote rapidly, as fearing that her hand might stop midway, so much untruth was there in that brief and ordinary inscription.

After another long pause she continued: "It is now nearly ten years since you and I quarrelled about —" and then the old silver tea-pot presented itself, and appeared to be such a ridiculous cause for disrapture and estrangement between a brother and sister, that Mrs. Barnard threw down her pen, making thereby a great fat blot on the paper, and compelling a new commencement of her epistle.

Mrs. Barnard's second attempt was not more successful than the first, and she was on the point of abandoning the letter in despair, when a brilliant thought came into her head. She rang her bell, and Scott, in due time, answered the summons.

"Shut the door, Scott, and then sit down; I want to talk to you."

Scott was not unused to such conferences, and so she obeyed without experiencing any surprise.

"I have told you very often," said Mrs. Barnard, "how shamefully my brother Ralph and his wife behaved to me years ago."

"Yes, ma'am, in refusing you —"

"Yes, that was part of their bad conduct," interrupted Mrs. Barnard, wishing to avoid details. "They behaved badly — very — but one is in her

grave, and for aught I know the other may be hastening to it. He'll be fifty the day after to-morrow."

"That is not very old, ma'am," Scott ventured to observe.

"No, but my brother was very racketty when young; often got tipsy, and stayed out late at nights, dancing, and that sort of thing."

"Indeed," said Scott.

"However, most men have some faults, and Ralph had his. Now, I've been thinking, and so has Mr. Barnard, that as he has not married again, and as he has no child, it would be a pity to let this family quarrel go on until, perhaps, my brother might be adopting somebody, or be leaving his property to hospitals, or doing some folly of that kind."

Scott merely bowed her head, as she remembered a time when her father, who had been a school-master, laid poor, and very sick, in one of those noble institutions, and received as much care and kindly tending as could be found at the bedside of a king.

"We settled this morning," continued Mrs. Barnard, "that the quarrel should be made up, as the day after to-morrow is his birthday; and I have been trying to write to him, but for the life of me I can't! I can't! As I write, I remember words spoken in our quarrel, and I — well, I can't say the civil things which ought to be in a letter of reconciliation."

"Why not wait until to-morrow, ma'am?" asked Scott.

"No, I want Ralph to get it on his birthday,

and Mr. Barnard must see it this evening. Yes; I have thought, Scott, that as you write as good a letter as I do — quite — you must imagine yourself in my place, and write to Ralph, saying, 'it is nearly ten years since we quarrelled,' and all that. Here's what I have written; do something in that way, and I'll copy it if I can."

Poor Scott was greatly flurried by this request of her mistress, but Mrs. Barnard was positive — so positive that she left Scott in the dressing-room, and went into the garden to walk herself calm.

Nelly Scott was a clever girl for her station. Her father had been the struggling master of a day-school, and taught his daughter to read and write fairly; and had Nelly had a better training than the servants' hall, she might have passed muster for something more than she was in the crowd of life.

At first Scott was frightened at the task imposed upon her by her mistress, but after a time she gained courage, and rather enjoyed the idea of being selected as a complete letter-writer in making up a family quarrel.

When this work of fiction was completed, and submitted to the perusal of Mrs. Barnard, she objected to the warmth of some of Nelly's affectionate expressions, and resolutely toned them down in the process of copying what was a really sensible production.

"I have no wish, Scott," said Mrs. Barnard, "to lead Ralph to imagine that I am overflowing with sisterly love, or any such nonsense, because I should not be able to keep up the deception, neither would

he believe it. I want to be friends for the sake of Oswald, and what he may get by it. Ralph and I never agreed very well when we were young. He was always very obstinate and self-willed, and I suppose I was the same, so I shall not say anything about our old affection, or the days of our childhood. You got that out of some novel. You have said a deal more than I could have done, but I suppose it must go."

Neither Nelly Scott nor Mrs. Barnard thought what that conversation would lead to at the time it passed between them.

Mr. Barnard returned from the City at his usual hour, and having resigned his sceptre, or umbrella, in the hall, and hung up his crown, or hat, on its appointed peg, he became the dutiful subject and the obedient servant of his dominant wife.

Mr. Barnard went through the ceremony of saluting Mrs. Barnard's cheek, which was the nearest approach to an embrace which she permitted. The small flame which flickered in Hymen's torch when they had married had long been extinguished.

"The Christophers called after lunch, but I did not ask them to stay dinner, which they came for, I fancy, as I wanted to have you alone," said Mrs. Barnard.

"Quite right, my dear, quite right," replied Barnard, "though I fancy I told Christopher senior that we were at home all the week, and should be glad to see him and his son Tom. But it's no great matter."

"How often have I told you that I object to

your giving those general invitations? They are always creating confusion at home, and are not complimentary to your friends. So you must get out of it the best way you can."

"No difficulty, my dear, not the least," replied Mr. Barnard, smiling feebly, "if I only knew what you had said."

"Said? — O, I told him that I didn't expect you home; that I thought you'd gone to Greenwich."

"Without you?" asked Mr. Barnard.

"You did *once*, you know," remarked Mrs. Barnard, with a slight emphasis.

"But only once," replied Mr. Barnard, "and that a long time ago."

Dinner was announced, and a very good dinner it was; ample enough to have made the two Christophers no inconvenience, had they been invited to have partaken of it.

Mr. Barnard spoke little during dinner, as he was rather disconcerted at what had happened. Christopher and Son were old clients of his house of business, and contractors for *fêtes* and flower-shows. Mr. Barnard had thought that a snap-dinner at his villa might have led to the disposal of certain wines, which had belied the promise of their youth, and were not presentable in good society. However, a few glasses of his own generous Burgundy restored his equanimity, and the accession of the too lively Oswald to the dessert prevented him relapsing into meditation of any kind.

Oswald was conscious of his power, and made

the most of it. He would have everything that his mamma thought not good for him, including brandy-cherries and pineapple. He resolutely refused to leave the room when Scott came for him, unless he were permitted to have a sip of papa's wine, and when that was conceded him, he seized the full glass with both hands, and drank off the contents.

When Oswald had been removed, Mr. Barnard said, somewhat regretfully,

"My dear, I am afraid — I am afraid that boy has a natural liking for wine."

"Yes, — when it is very good," replied Mrs. Barnard.

Had Master Oswald Barnard on his retirement been treated with an emetic, and kept on toast-and-water for the rest of his days, we should, perhaps, have heard the last of him.

Mrs. Barnard then produced her letter, and gave it to her husband to read.

Mr. Barnard was dull of comprehension, as he read the letter twice through, once at the table and again at the window, as though he thought a better light would make the wording of the letter clearer. When he had finished, he turned to Mrs. Barnard, and said, energetically,

"Well, my dear, if any one had given me *that* and said it was yours, I would not have believed them! After all that I have heard you say about your brother Ralph and —"

"Will it answer the purpose for which it is written?" asked Mrs. Barnard, abruptly.

"Well, I — of course — if it does not it ought to do!" replied Barnard, bothered.

"Then we'll say no more about the past, at least at present, so be kind enough to ring for coffee, as they seem to have forgotten us."

Mr. Barnard rang the bell.

CHAPTER II.

IF any man in the county of Sussex was particularly astonished on April 30th, 18—, it was Ralph Deering, of Hartsden. Had every bird in his dovecote flown into the breakfast parlour, each bearing an olive-branch in its beak, it would not have more astonished him than did the missive of peace and reconciliation from his sister Louisa Barnard, which had reached him by post that morning. There had been other letters in the post-bag, but they remained unopened on the table until Ralph Deering had read and re-read Mrs. Barnard's offer to let bygones be bygones, and to come down with her husband, child, and maid, to stay a month in the home of her fathers at Hartsden.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this?" was Mr. Deering's first ejaculation when he could speak. "What scheme has that artful hussy got in her head, that has made her concoct such a mess of humble: pie as this?"

FALERNIAN VILLA, CLAPTON,
April 29, 18—.

MY DEAR BROTHER RALPH!
("Very dear.") It's now nearly ten years since you and I had that foolish quarrel over a matter to which I will no further allude than to say, perhaps I was wrong ("So you were.") in pressing a claim which you would not admit to be just ("Nor

was it. The plate was left to me, absolutely, and as it ought to have been." It seems absurd that an only brother and an only sister should be at enmity for such a trifle, and continue so now that death has removed so many that were dear to both, warning us that a time is coming when reconciliation will be impossible ("That's very like preaching, and when Loo was pious she always meant mischief."). I have thought of this many times during the past year, and at last I resolved that, as tomorrow is your birthday, I would write to you and offer my sisterly good wishes for many, many happy returns of the day, in the hope that you will receive them as they are meant ("I shall do that, I dare say.") and let there be an end of all unkindness between us. If you desire, Ralph, that we should be brother and sister again, and are willing to give me an invitation, I will come down to Hartsden for a month, and bring my husband and son, who are also anxious for this reconciliation. Your nephew, Oswald, is a charming, intelligent little fellow, and very like what I can just remember you to have been when you pushed me into the pond at the bottom of the garden ("Flummery! But I did nigh drown her, that's the truth."). Barnard is very fond of fishing and haymaking, and other rural sports, and you would get on well together. Barnard and Oswald unite with me in love and remembrances. I shall be anxious to hear from you, and remain,

Your affectionate

though long estranged sister,

LOUISA BARNARD.

P.S. — I shall have to bring my maid, who is also a sort of attendant on Oswald. She's a superior person for her position, and would give no trouble, but be of use, as I suppose yours is like most other bachelor households, not arranged for the reception of ladies.

"Yes, very like a bachelor's household," mused Mr. Deering. "Had poor Maggie lived — she turned out better than I took her for — this Old Place might have been lively enough by this time. Our baby would have been nine years old come August," and then Mr. Deering re-read Mrs. Barnard's letter, and was perplexed exceedingly. And so we will leave him for the present.

The "Old Place" had not been built more than sixty years, but it stood on the site of an Elizabethan manor-house, and some of the architectural features of the preceding building had been preserved in the newer erection. The great parlour and the dining-room both had large bay windows with latticed glazings, and looked out into a spacious garden, here and there intersected by thick yew hedges, which served as screens against the northerly and easterly winds. The ceilings of the rooms had oak traverses, with bosses and small pendants, and the wide fireplaces had been furnished with dogs, as wood — until the formation of the adjoining railroad had made coal attainable — was the only fuel procurable at Hartsden. The furniture was solid, old-fashioned, and faded by long usage, but carefully tended by Mr. Deering's exemplary house-

keeper, Mrs. Coppice, the wife of the farm bailiff, who also lived in the house, being without what Mr. Malthus, we believe, named "encumbrances."

The velvety lawns and broad walks of the garden were kept in excellent order, and one large arbour was fitted up to be, what Deering called, "a chapel of ease to the dining-room," when he entertained his friends to dinner in the summer time. Hartsden stood on the top of a gentle rise, and from the terrace at the end of the garden was seen the valley which gave a name to the place. Hedgerows and clumps of trees lent diversity to the rich green meadows, and a distant railway viaduct added to the picturesqueness of the scene, which would have been certainly improved by the addition of a stream. At the opposite side of the valley was the small village of Hartslye, the light smoke from whose chimneys gave life to the landscape by day, whilst at night the lights shining from its windows were pleasant indications of other homes and neighbours.

The square grey tower and gilded weathercock of the church showed above the tops of some grand old elms, and had served in former times as a landmark to wayfarers. In the extreme distance were the Surrey Hills, studded with clusters of trees, and ever varying in form and colour from the changes of light and atmosphere.

The Deerings had lived at Hartsden for more than a century. At first they were only tenants, combining with their farming the business of land agents and valuers. When the profligacy and extravagance of the two last lords of the soil made

money more in demand than could be supplied from their rent-roll, the land about Hartsden came, acre by acre, as easy bargains to the provident Deerings, and the father of Ralph bought the house and remaining land a cheap pennyworth.

By the good management of the same prudent parent, Ralph was also provided with a wife, whose dowry of five hundred acres of land joined the Hartsden property. Though the match was at first not much to his liking, Ralph knew how difficult it was to turn his father from any settled purpose, and therefore he married Margaret Bodgers. For three years they lived together at first contentedly, and then happily, but at the end of that time poor Margaret died, taking with her the babe to which she had given birth.

Ralph Deering felt his loss keenly for a time, to his own wonderment. But Margaret, though a homely woman — as yeomen's daughters were once on a time — had a tender nature, that won its way into the hearts of others, and into her husband Ralph's the deepest. Not that he could be said to have grieved long; no, he thought it as unmanly and as useless to mourn for his wife, as he would have done to have grieved over a bad harvest, or ill-luck with his stock. Besides, he was a popular man at the market table, a keen sportsman, and no one was better mounted in the hunting field, or was a bolder rider. He was a capital shot, and though he made a show of preserving his game, his neighbours were always welcome to a day's sport and a good dinner afterwards. He was exceedingly hospitable, and

rarely as the great parlour was thrown open to lady visitors, the spiders were kept out of the dining-room curtains by clouds of smoke from his neighbours' pipes. His harvest-homes were first-rate affairs; no make-believe of playing Squire Bountiful, and yet limiting the enjoyment of those who had gathered in the harvest. Ralph Deering was a good farmer and a good master, and not a cottage upon his estate but was fit for good servants to live in like human fellows. Almost everyone spoke well of Ralph Deering, and yet he continued a widower. And why?

The truth was, that like many a good fellow whose heart is as bold as a lion's, who could speak his mind, and would too to the king upon his throne, Ralph was cowed in the society of women, and if ever he had thought favourably of any other than Margaret, his courage failed him, and he dismissed the fair one with a sigh.

That is a fact worth noting, ladies, and many a sheepish young man has the making of a good husband if you would only take the trouble to trot him out.

So Hartsden had been without a mistress for more than ten years, and now his sister Louisa, who had quarrelled with Ralph over a trifle of plate, who had left him lonely and forgotten all those years, had written him a letter with no more warmth in it than there was in a dish of skim-milk, proposing to shake hands, and come as his guest for a whole month.

Ralph Deering was a good fellow, but he was not without his failings. He had all the craftiness

and suspiciousness so common to men who have lived much alone, or who have had a narrow education, and which sometimes become meanness. With those who mix freely in the world such characteristics assume the more liberal phases of prudence and caution, but are not incompatible with generosity and honour. Ralph, therefore, put the worst construction on his sister's peaceful advances — he was not far in the wrong — and he also conceived such a project, should his suspicions prove correct, as would result in sister Loo's utter discomfiture.

Ralph was quite as much perplexed to frame a reply as his sister had been to construct her letter. It was not until the second day after the receipt of Mrs. Barnard's proposal for peace that Ralph dispatched his answer. He invited the Barnards to come to Hartsden.

There was a glow of triumph in Mrs. Barnard's face as she gave her husband her brother's letter.

"I knew how it would be," she said; "I knew I had but to hold up my finger at any time to bring about a reconciliation with that soft-hearted fellow."

"And does he really surrender at discretion, as I may say!" exclaimed Mr. Barnard, hastily reading Ralph's rather brief epistle. "He does! and — really, Loo, you are a remarkable woman!"

"Don't call me Loo — and there's nothing remarkable in a brother and sister being reconciled."

"No, no, certainly not; but I must admire the tact with which it was done," said Mr. Barnard, mildly.

"But it's not done yet," replied Mrs. Barnard; "all will depend upon circumstances. Ralph, I fancy, is still a little sore; and if he should not receive me cordially I am afraid — that is, it is possible — that I may say something not quite agreeable."

"Possibly, possibly," said Barnard, rather inconsiderately.

"Well, that would be inconvenient," replied Mrs. Barnard, sharply; "and so — I have thought the matter over — you shall go to Hartsden the day before and smooth the way."

"Oh!" was all Mr. Barnard trusted himself to utter.

"You can have been to Chichester on business, and taken Hartsden on your way back," continued Mrs. Barnard. "If you find that Ralph is really disposed to be friends, you can meet us at the Hartslye Station the next day, and if not — why it is only to take return tickets and come home again."

"Well," said Mr. Barnard, "I see no objection to that;" for to do him justice, away from Falernian Villa and its mistress, Mr. Barnard had plenty of pluck. He was a man of the world, and accustomed to overcome small difficulties, having been long in the wine trade.

Mrs. Barnard replied to her brother's letter, and having done so, packing was instantly commenced.

On the third day after, Mr. Barnard started for Chichester, and in due course returned and presented himself at Hartsden about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Deering was fortunately at home, being rather indisposed, having taken the chair at a Farmers' Club on the preceding day, and "made a night of it." What that meant in former days some grey-heads may remember, and rejoice that such "liberal meetings" are things of the past.

"Mr. Deering," said Barnard, when introduced into the great parlour where Ralph had been taking a nap, "I cannot find words to express my gratification at once more taking you by the hand."

"Well, as to that," replied Deering, "I am glad to see you again at Hartsden, but — I didn't expect you till to-morrow. Where's Louisa?"

"Little dreaming that I am once more under this dear old roof," replied Mr. Barnard, pleasantly; "I was to have met her on her way down to-morrow, but having settled some business I had at Chichester sooner than I expected, I thought, rather than spend a lonely night in a strange inn, I would come on at once to Hartsden and tax your hospitality a day earlier."

"And you're heartily welcome, Mr. Barnard."

"Not *Mr.* Barnard, please, — Barnard, or Joe Barnard, as you used to call me in the days when we came courting here, 'A long time ago.'"

"Well, Barnard, then," said Ralph. "They've seen to your luggage, I suppose," ringing the bell; "and you have not dined, of course?"

"No; but I made a punishing lunch before leaving Chichester, and can do with tea by-and-by."

"Tea! not at Hartsden, Mr. ——" Ralph checked

himself, and a servant having answered the bell, added, "Take Mr. Barnard's luggage to his room, and send Mrs. Coppice here directly."

"Now, pray — I know you dine early in the country —"

"Well, I haven't been quite the thing to-day," interrupted Ralph; "and — oh! Mrs. Coppice, we shall want some dinner as soon as you can get it ready. What have you?"

"There's a nice fore-quarter of lamb, sir," replied the housekeeper.

"That'll do for one thing," said Ralph.

"Excellently; nothing else, I beg, on my account. I am excessively fond of lamb, — especially country lamb," observed Mr. Barnard.

"And you can broil a chicken, or roast a duck?"

"O, yes, sir; and there's a leveret as was shot yesterday," added Mrs. Coppice.

"Very well. When will dinner be ready?"

"At six, sir, or thereabouts," replied the housekeeper, who then went her way, rejoicing; for Mrs. Coppice delighted in the exercise of her art, and was as hospitable in disposition as her master.

"What shall we do to fill up the time, Barnard," asked Deering. "Take a stroll in the garden, or a walk down to the stock-yard. I've some pretty things there."

"Either, or both," replied Barnard, thinking at the same time, "No further inquiry about Louisa, — not a word of Oswald."

When they were fairly in the garden Mr. Bar-

nard thought he might as well "force the running" a little.

"Ah!" exclaimed Barnard, with a long-drawn sigh, "here is the dear old garden! Just as it was in 'auld lang syne.' There's the old bower where Louisa and I have sat and ——"

"Ah!" said Ralph, "by-the-by, how is my sister?"

"Well, quite well, I am delighted to say," replied Barnard, "and so is Oswald, our darling boy. Ah! Deering, you will be charmed with that little fellow when you know him. A fine, high-spirited chap — if he has a fault — rather too high-spirited, perhaps."

"O, school will fetch that out of him," remarked Deering. "When a boy has been well thrashed once or twice he is generally tame enough."

"My dear Deering," said Barnard, "pray don't say that again before your sister. She doats on Oswald! would give her life for him, I believe."

Deering gave a short grunt, but that might have been occasioned by opening the gate which led to the farm buildings.

"You can't imagine what a wife your sister has been!" said Barnard, not to lose ground. "You only knew her as the country girl — the unexpanded bud. But when it was necessary for her to assert herself as the mistress of a family she fulfilled her mission!" That was true enough.

"I don't doubt it. Loo was always a very positive person, and would have her own way. She

called it asserting a principle; I called it being d—perverse.”

“Oh! Ah, yes!” said Barnard, finding he was not progressing in the direction he had intended. “But time has mellowed all that, like good port she has deposited her crust, and —”

“That’s a beautiful heifer, Barnard,” interrupted Deering; “if you know anything about stock you must admire her.”

“I don’t know much about stock, but I do admire,” replied the obsequious Barnard, as there was something in Deering’s voice which reminded him of the absent Louisa.

As we have no desire to compel the reader to accompany the gentlemen through the litter of the stock-yard, or to repeat the different eulogiums which Deering passed upon his cattle and pigs, we will return to the house as Mrs. Coppice is serving up her plain and ample dinner.

“You needn’t dress, Barnard,” said Deering; “we will only change our boots, and wash, as I see we are rather late for dinner.”

“Just what I like,” replied Barnard “no ceremony. I’ll be ready in a brace of shakes.”

Whatever space of time is indicated by a brace of shakes we know not, but in about ten minutes the two gentlemen were seated at table.

Deering’s appetite had returned, and Mr. Barnard was nearly famishing, as the “punishing lunch” was all a fiction.

“Take some sherry,” said Deering, after a few moments’ devotion to the lamb.

"With pleasure," answered Barnard; and then, filling his glass and smiling at Deering, he thrust forth his hand, and would not be satisfied until he had shaken that of his brother-in-law.

The wine was swallowed at a gulp, but Barnard's highly educated palate forced him to recognise its provincial quality, although with the comforting assurance that it really was only sherry intimately associated with brandy.

The dinner proceeded, and again and again Deering passed the decanter, which Barnard did not refuse, although conscious that he was hazarding the loss of his night's rest and braving an attack of dyspepsia; but then it was for the good of his family.

With the removal of the cloth fresh difficulties presented themselves to the educated wine drinker. At first they came in the form of some formidable looking port, black as Erebus, and no doubt as strong as it was black. Barnard had unfortunately, before dinner, professed his liking for port, and he was sufficiently experienced in social peculiarities to know that every man is more or less offended when the quality of his port is in the least questioned. Barnard swallowed his dose like a good husband and father, and was relieved to find that there was only a *mesalliance* similar to that which had characterised the sherry.

After two glasses, however, he said:

"No more, thanks! I never exceed two glasses of port after dinner."

"Well, I don't care for wine myself, so" — rising, and ringing the bell — "we will have in the

grog and the cigars. I hope you smoke. Living so much alone as I have done, smoking has become a habit, and I cannot sleep without a whiff or two."

Now Mr. Barnard was a bad smoker — a wretchedly bad smoker, — but he declared he relished exceedingly the *smell* of tobacco: and so Ralph Deering blazed away, after almost compelling his companion to mix a glass of brandy and water.

Why do we make record of this somewhat boorish dinner? Because it was an instance of Ralph Deering's craftiness; as no man in the county had better wine than he when he desired only the enjoyment of his guests.

He knew that Barnard must be a seasoned vessel, and not easily overcome by good wine. Now Deering wanted to unsettle his brother-in-law, and make him talk.

"You never had but one child?" asked Deering, carelessly.

"Never but one," replied Barnard; "but we are content, for he is, in one word, a paragon of a boy."

"What, clever? Reads well, and all that?" asked Deering.

"He has intellect for anything," replied Barnard; "but we — both Mrs. Barnard and myself — are opposed to the forcing system, and Oswald as yet has not been — what shall I say? developed."

"A bit of a dunce, then, I suppose?" said Deering.

"Only so far as books are concerned," replied Barnard. "At all athletic sports he is superior to

his years; bat and ball, cricket, breaking windows, and —”

“And my sister, you say, doats on him?” asked Deering, rather quietly.

“Yes — doats — there is no other word,” replied Barnard. “I assure you, my dear boy, that I am a minor consideration to that child. I am made very sensible of that at times.”

Mr. Barnard had unconsciously sipped and sipped the potent draught he had concocted at his brother-in-law's suggestion, whilst the fumes of the tobacco which Deering poured forth continuously, surrounded the non-smoker's head, despite his efforts to buffet it away by means of his dinner napkin. After a time Barnard's voice was rather broken, and his words slightly deprived of their proper syllabic arrangement.

“The boy's the first consideration, is he? That's rather too bad, though,” said Deering, with affected sympathy. “You the head of the family.”

“The head of the family!” repeated Barnard, *sotto voce*, and shaking his head.

“Then Master Oswald, I suppose, occupies that position?”

“He does, sir!” replied Barnard, striking the table with his closed fist, “and his mother allows it. I believe she would walk bare-foot to St. Paul's, ride outside a 'bus, do anything for the sake of that boy.”

“Give up friends?” asked Deering.

“Dozens, sir! — Forgive old foes — do anything for Oswald. — Bless him!”

It was evident that Mr. Barnard was in a condition to go to bed; and as Mr. Deering had learned all he sought to know, he proposed to ring for candles, to which Mr. Barnard gave a ready assent.

"Deering," this was Mr. Barnard's exit speech, — "Deering, you will like that boy — your nephew, mind that. — A boy of promise. "You'll take to that boy. Everybody does. You'll love him. — Oswald Barnard Deering — think of that. — Good night, dear old fellow. — You'll love that boy."

And under the careful guidance of a man-servant Mr. Barnard was conducted to his sleeping-room.

When the door of the dining-room was again closed Mr. Deering lighted another cigar, and resting his arm upon the table, sent forth a few rapid puffs.

Then he laughed a little spiteful laugh, as though he were thinking, "I'm as clever as sister Loo, although I have lived here all my life, and for the last ten years lonely and forgotten by her. I was not to be surprised into a forgetfulness of the past, nor to be fooled into the belief that it was sisterly affection — sisterly regret — which had made her do such violence to her stubborn nature, that she could ask me to forget our quarrel — almost to forgive her. No — I knew there was some other motive than a wish for reconciliation with me whom for ten years she has left to the companionship of these empty rooms and their old memories. I was right; brother Barnard has told me so, and I will keep the secret until I tell it in my own way. If I were to die to-

night, or any time before I had made a will, sister Loo would laugh over my grave, and Master Oswald Barnard Deering be some day master of Hartsden. As I couldn't sleep with that fear upon me I may as well write as try to sleep."

Some such thoughts must have been passing through his mind as he rung the bell and desired the servants to go to rest, whilst he sat writing long past midnight.

CHAPTER III.

MR. BARNARD passed an uneasy night on the great four-poster which had been assigned to him. After a short, stertorous sleep, he had awakened to all the after-miseries of a debauch of bad wine, and reproached himself for the sacrifice he had made at the domestic altar. But when he reflected that Deering might have taken offence at any disparagement of his wine, and thought what SHE would have said to such an undesirable commencement of the new intimacy with their wealthy relative, he resolved to bear with patience the qualms which oppressed him and drove away refreshing sleep from his pillows of goose-down. He tried to recall the conversation which had passed between him and Deering, as he had a half-confused recollection of having spoken somewhat unkindly of Louisa, but his memory became misty, and he soon lost all the shadows of the past. Ugly thoughts, too, came into his mind of hogsheads, and pipes, and casks, that he had sent out into the world at the beginning of his commercial career, not to cheer the hearts of men, but to steal away their brains, and to generate such discomfort as now afflicted himself. He resolved to make atonement by improving the character of his brother-in-law's cellar, even if he presented him with the means of doing so

— as Louisa had proposed to stay a month at least at Hartsden if matters went on pleasantly, and good wine was necessary to the preservation of her good temper. When the servant had brought his hot water in the morning Mr. Barnard arose and made his toilette, not in comfort certainly, but having due regard to time and place, he presented himself in the breakfast-room, attired like a fine, middle-aged English gentleman, one of forty years ago.

He found that Deering had been up an hour or more (late as he had retired to bed), and had visited his stock, of which he was very proud, having some pedigree animals amongst them which could challenge comparison with any in the county.

“Good morning, Barnard,” said Deering, seeing at a glance how it had fared with his brother-in-law during the night. “Charming morning this for a walk round the home farm.”

“It is a charming morning, certainly,” replied Barnard, looking out of window; “but — I don’t think I shall have time for a stroll, as I have to meet Louisa by the one o’clock down — and — No, I think I’d rather not, this morning.”

“All right. Liberty Hall this, you know,” said Deering, “and here’s breakfast.”

Deering had obtained the information he wanted overnight, and was too good-natured not to endeavour to mitigate the sufferings of the vanquished. He had conjectured rightly that Barnard’s appetite for breakfast would be somewhat of the feeblest, and Mrs. Coppice had therefore had instructions to prepare accordingly. Mr. Barnard found his appetite

improve by what it fed on, and was at last surprised and consoled by a *liqueur* of brandy not to be excelled even at Gog Lane or Falernian Villa.

"Why the deuce didn't he produce that last night, instead of that beastly brown poison I swallowed?" thought Barnard.

We know why.

"Louisa comes by the one train, you say?" said Deering. "How many are there? The boy and his nurse —"

"Not nurse, if you please," interposed Mr. Barnard. "Oswald don't like it to be thought he has a nurse, so Scott is considered to be Mrs. Barnard's maid."

"Well, she only counts as one, nurse or maid," said Deering; "so the phaeton and light cart will bring the humans and the luggage. You can drive a pair, I suppose?"

"Yes — of course — I dare say I could," replied Barnard, whose costume was quite horsey enough to justify Deering's inquiry. "But I don't like strange horses, and —"

"No consequence, I'll drive, and —" said Deering.

"My dear fellow," interrupted Barnard, "that's very good of you, but I would suggest that as you and Louisa have not met for so many — for a long time, that perhaps your meeting had not better take place at the station."

"Well, there's reason in that," said Deering. "My man shall drive you over. Coppice shall take the

light cart — I suppose the lady's maid won't object to ride in such a trap?"

"She has lived," replied Barnard, slowly, "she has lived with Louisa four years —"

"That's enough — she won't object to anything," said Deering, with a smile, which Barnard, after a short pause, reciprocated.

"You've not been into the Great Parlour, I fancy," said Deering, leading the way to that apartment. "Not much alteration, you see."

"None — I can remember everything here," replied Barnard, "though I have not seen it since the happiest day of my life."

"Since what?"

"Since my wedding-day — the day which made me the husband of your dear sister Louisa."

"Oh, ah!" said Deering, not quite realising the idea. "The old furniture looks the worse for wear, like its owner."

"Well, yes; it certainly bears the marks of time," replied Barnard.

"I have never cared to disturb it," said Deering, rather sadly. "Somehow one associates those dead and gone with such things — but lonely men have odd fancies."

"Let us hope, my dear Deering," replied Barnard, holding out his hand, which his brother-in-law did not take — "let us hope that you will be lonely no more — that once again a female influence will be felt within these walls, and that Hartsden will be more of a home to you than it has been for years past."

"Yes. Let us hope so," said Deering; "and it shall be if I can make it so."

"How happy I am to hear you say that! Louisa will do her best to help in that direction, I know she will."

Barnard hardly believed what he said, but he was a prophet, nevertheless.

A neat mail phaeton and pair, a light tax cart drawn by a handsome cob, were waiting the arrival of the down train at Hartslye station. Mr. Barnard was on the platform, ready to receive his household, and in due time the engine was heard screaming in the distance, like an angry scold abusing a recalcitrant husband. The train stopped, and Mr. Barnard handed out his wife, and son, and bird-cage, leaving Scott to follow with the usual profusion of shawls, parasols, bags, and dressing-cases.

"Welcome, my dears," said Barnard, "you are punctual —"

"You had better look after the luggage, Barnard," interrupted Mrs. Barnard; "Scott will show you our packages — six — no, seven — but she knows."

Mr. Barnard obeyed with alacrity, and having seen the luggage placed on a porter's truck, returned to Mrs. Barnard, then looking forth from the little waiting-room at the station.

"Everything right, Scott?" asked Mrs. Barnard.

"Yes, ma'am, everything."

"And now, Barnard, come here. All pleasant at Hartsden?"

"Eminently so," replied Barnard. "Deering re-

ceived me like — like a prince — an affectionate prince. Provided dinner and —”

“Then you think he will be glad to receive me and Oswald?”

“Delighted, I am sure,” answered Barnard. “He spoke of you with brotherly warmth, and as for Oswald! he really must have been longing to have had a nephew, he was so interested about the darling. I have brought a phaeton and cart —”

“Very well — then as soon as the luggage is ready — you had better take my dressing-case from Scott — and the bird-cage — we will go. You and Oswald can ride at the back, and I will sit by the groom.”

“Of course, my dear,” replied Barnard.

But Master Oswald wouldn't ride at the back with papa; he would go with Scott — Scott, and nobody else — in the light cart. This arrangement, however, was not to be permitted.

“I would not have that boy present himself at Hartsden for the first time in a cart for a thousand pounds!” said Mrs. Barnard, firmly; “I should look upon it as a bad omen. No, Barnard, Scott and Oswald must ride at the back, and you must ride in the other thing.”

Mr. Barnard did not mind, not he. He was in the country, where nobody knew him, so the head of the family took his seat on the luggage, relieved of the dressing-case, however, but still custodian of the canary.

The meeting between Ralph Deering and his sister would have been undemonstrative enough had

it been left to Ralph, but Mrs. Barnard threw her arms around his neck, and tried very hard to cry. But hers was a stony nature, and no water was to be found near the surface. She did kiss her brother, and call him "dear old Ralph;" but finding herself deficient in words, she seized Oswald, and lifted him up to her brother's face, saying, "Kiss him, Ralph — kiss him, Oswald — your only uncle."

Ralph gave the cheek of the wondering boy a hearty smack, and then said, "Let me look at you, my man. You are a fine little fellow, and I hope a good boy also."

"Yes," replied Oswald, "and I want a piece of cake; mamma said I was to have what I like when I got here."

"So you shall; though your mamma spoils you, I fancy."

"Oh no, Ralph," replied Mrs. Barnard; "he is under proper discipline, I assure you; though I do not like curbing a boy's spirit too much."

Oswald proved the effect of his mamma's teaching by tugging violently at her dress, and again demanding "some cake — some cake and wine."

Having resolutely refused to say "If you please," to Mrs. Barnard's great mortification, Oswald was led out of the room, and consigned to Scott, who had orders to satisfy the young gentleman's requirements.

Master Oswald was no respecter of persons when he was in one of his tempers, and as he elected to be particularly disagreeable and self-willed on the day of his introduction to Hartsden, poor Scott had the benefit of his society throughout the afternoon.

During one of his pets he threw a small ball, with which he had been playing, in the face of the young woman, and the blow was sufficiently severe to bring tears into her eyes.

Mrs. Barnard and her brother came up at the time, and though Scott tried to conceal her tears (she was really fond of the young tyrant), Deering perceived that she had been crying, and said, "What's the matter, my lass? Crying?"

"No, sir, not quite crying," replied Scott; "Master Oswald threw his ball —"

"Yes, she is crying," interrupted Oswald. "She's crying because she's left her sweetheart, the carpenter, in London."

Mrs. Barnard could not help laughing at this sally of her clever son; and as Scott called him a "naughty boy," and ran after him, nothing more was then said of the matter.

We have no desire to chronicle all the trifling incidents of this reconciliatory visit to Hartsden. Mrs. Barnard was greatly surprised to find how dingy and dreary the old house had become, and being one who looked far into the future, she determined before leaving to suggest certain improvements and additions, which if not really needed by her brother, might be acceptable to — well, shall we say — to those who should succeed to the property?

As Barnard found Hartsden intolerably dull, even after Deering had discovered some unexceptionable port, sherry, and claret, he had more than once been compelled to return to London, and might — if the glass of Momus had not been a fable — have had

the satisfaction of knowing that no one regretted his absence. On each occasion he brought down with him, at his wife's desire, some article of modern *bijouterie*, which, being placed with judgment about the great parlour, served to make the dinginess of the old furniture more noticeable.

Mrs. Barnard had all the craftiness of her brother, and this was an instance of its development.

One day, when the brother and sister were sitting in the bay window-seat of the great parlour, looking at the distant hills and the intervening village, Mrs. Barnard said, quite carelessly, "Ralph, how these latticed panes interfere with the prospect. They quite spoil it, cutting up the view into pieces."

"I never noticed that," replied Ralph.

"Nor did I formerly, but since I have seen how much plate glass improves a house, I wonder how one ever did without it."

"Plate glass?" murmured Deering.

"Yes, it's so cheap now," continued Mrs. Barnard; "so very cheap since the duty was taken off, that it seems a sin not to use it."

"There's much in what you say," replied Ralph, "and I'll think about it."

"And I tell you what, Ralph," said Mrs. Barnard, "as I hope now to pay you a long visit every summer, you ought to make a dressing-room and a boudoir — a small private sitting-room to that great bed-room upstairs. Ladies expect such comforts now-a-days."

"I don't see how they can be added?" remarked Deering.

"Oh, I'll show you in a moment," replied Mrs.

Barnard, going to her writing-case, and making a rude diagram of the room. "There's the room as it is, much too large — you may have a bed-room too large, you know. Now, take off so much of the room — there's your dressing-place; now cut through this window, and there's your entrance to the boudoir, which can be built on to the end of the house, and the lower part would make a snug little library, which is wanted."

"Well, that seems simple enough," replied Deering, folding up the plan, and placing it in his side pocket, "and I'll think about it."

Mrs. Barnard thought she had gone far enough for the present, and so changed the subject.

A fortnight of the projected visit had passed, and Oswald had won his way into the good graces of his uncle. At least it seemed so, as Ralph very often joined the boy at his play when Scott had charge of him; for old as Oswald was, his anxious parents regarded him almost as a baby. Uncle Ralph certainly took a great interest in his nephew, as he constantly questioned Scott about him; and on one occasion gave her a sovereign in acknowledgment of her evident affection for the boy. Scott having been bred in the servants' hall, received the money with a smile — she could not curtsy, as she was sitting at work on a garden seat.

"You must have an excellent temper, Mrs. Scott, to bear with his 'winning ways,' as Mrs. Barnard calls them. He seems to like plaguing you," said Deering, "I suppose there was some truth in what he said about your sweetheart, the carpenter."

Scott opened her large hazel eyes, as if she had forgotten (or affected to forget) to what Mr. Deering alluded; and on being reminded of Oswald's speech on the first day of arrival, the young woman coloured very red, and said, "it was all Master Oswald's nonsense." She spoke the truth. Sweethearting is nonsense, but oh! what pleasant nonsense when the triflers are not quite five-and-twenty!

Oswald soon discovered the power he had gained with his uncle Ralph, who, at the boy's request, and to the delight of Mrs. Barnard, had bought a pony, and taken upon himself the task of riding-master, the *manége* at first being the garden. Although there was not any apparent danger, Ralph knew what a precious treasure was entrusted to him, and he never would assume the sole responsibility; so Mrs. Barnard or her maid invariably walked at the side of the pony whilst uncle led it.

But we have said we had no desire to chronicle all the trifling incidents of this visit, although Deering had prevailed on his sister to extend it to six weeks.

"What smoke is that yonder?" asked Mrs. Barnard, as she and Ralph were walking on the terrace at the end of the garden. "I don't remember any cottage in the green lane."

"Oh, that?" replied Deering; "that comes from some tenants of mine, who pay no rent, but get me at times into sad disgrace with my neighbours."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, they're gipsies, who will come and camp there," replied Deering.

"But I wouldn't have them there, so close to the house," said Mrs. Barnard.

"Poor devils!" continued Deering. "They're a wretched set when you know all about them. It's all very fine to sing about a 'gipsey's life for me,' and paint pictures of red cloaks and pretty faces. They're as miserable a lot as lives, and I haven't the heart to make the case harder by sending them from an old camping ground. You must remember them forty years ago, Loo."

Mrs. Barnard did not choose to remember anything so long ago before Scott, who had come on the terrace with Master Oswald.

"If you like we'll walk down to them," said Deering. "We may get a hotchiwichey for Oswald."

"A hotchiwhat?"

"A hedgehog; the true gipsies have quite a language of their own," replied Deering. "I know a word or two from talking to them."

"You! Why, I thought they were all thieves?" asked Mrs. Barnard, surprised.

"They never rob me," replied her brother, "but I fancy they are cheats and rogues to a man. My neighbours complain sometimes of a missing goose or a rooster, but they take nothing of mine except, perhaps, a jack-hare or a rabbit; and they're welcome to them."

"I always heard that they lived on the fat of the land," said Mrs. Barnard; "and passed their time drinking, and singing, and dancing."

"As for the fat of the land, they will eat any-

thing, even when the butcher has not been called in professionally. It is a saying of theirs, I am told, in all countries, that —

“The flesh of a beast that God kills must be better than that killed by the hand of man.” *

“The nasty creatures!” cried Mrs. Barnard.

“As for their merry-making, I don’t fancy they have more than a fair share of that. Some of them play the fiddle to live by it — as others play upon tin pots and grinding wheels. Rely upon it, Loo, they are more to be pitied than envied. Can you manage this gap? let me help you over. Now, Oswald! Now, Mrs. Scott; hold tight of my hand — and there we are!”

The party had come into the green lane within a few yards of the gipsies’ tent — a tattered, well patched blanket, strained over ribs of hazel. A woman, dirty in the extreme, was washing a few ragged articles; and a pot, suspended from a tripod of sticks, and filled apparently with potatoes, was boiling over a fire made of wood.

An old man, almost blind from age, was cutting vent-pegs from some willow branches, and a woman, almost as old, and evidently a practical naturalist, was overlooking the head of an urchin.

“Well, Binney,” said Deering, “you are back to your old quarters.”

The man made a bow and the woman curtsied, without any appearance of fear.

“Thanks to your honour,” said the man, “we

* See “Hoyland’s Historical Survey,” &c.

come to the old pitch once a year. It's not every gentleman as lets us come twice, though little's the harm we does."

"Well, do none, and then you may stay, Binney," said Deering. "Have you got a hedgehog? I know you are a luxurious old fellow, and like a *tit-bit*."

The old man laughed, and said something that "a hotchiwichey wasn't game or poultry, your honour," and they had got one in the donkey-cart, and the gentry were asked to see it.

Deering, however, stopped for a moment, and spoke a few rapid words to the old woman before he joined his party.

"Well, Oswald, shall I give Binney sixpence for the hedgehog?" said Uncle Ralph.

"A nasty ugly thing! I won't have it," replied Oswald.

"Then you must give Binney sixpence for showing it to you," and the coin which Deering tossed to the old man looked remarkably like a shilling.

The old man made bows and uttered blessings which would have been cheap at half-a-crown.

"Your wife tells me you're not so strong as you were, so — I've told her she can come in the evenings for some milk for a week or two. Come, Mrs. Barnard, you must charge the gap again, unless you care to walk round by the homestead."

Mrs. Barnard did not affect walking much, and so Mr. Deering had to assist the party as he had done before. Mr. Deering was a very crafty man, and one that kept his own counsel.

However agreeable the prolongation of her visit was to Mrs. Barnard, it was far from acceptable to her maid, as Nelly Scott had received a letter from John Knight, the carpenter, which she would have been glad to have answered in person.

It began —

“Dear Nelly Scott,” — servants had not attained to the dignity of “Miss” at the time John wrote — but love-letters are stupid things at best when read at second hand, therefore we will merely add a *précis* of the one before us.

John had not formally proposed to Nelly, but they were coming to consider one another as sweet-hearts, and she was, therefore, not altogether surprised to read what John had written. John said how much he admired and regarded her, and should have liked to have told her so “by word of mouth,” but as he had heard at the Villa that she was not coming back for some weeks, he had written to her before he started for Jersey, where he was engaged to go on a job which would last over some months. John was of a roving disposition, as Nelly had gathered in one of their walks together, and so, as we have said, she was not quite surprised to read all that he had written. She was to think well over what he had said, and he would write to her again from Jersey, when he had settled.

It had been better, perhaps, had he told her to obey the dictates of her heart, and have answered him at once.

Mrs. Binney did not fail to profit by Mr. Deering's bounty, and as she was old and infirm to boot, she

generally remained for a time in the kitchen, to rest herself. The under servants regarded her with a kind of awe, as they knew she told fortunes on the sly, and that many of her predictions had come true, at least they had been told so. They were not much sillier than their betters, for who has not read of the gipsey's dupes among persons whose education and position in society ought to have protected them from giving credence or entertainment to the predictions of such miserable impostors? And Mother Binney had her believers, and even Mrs. Coppice, "just out of fun," had had her fortune told. Despite her "contempt for such rubbish," Mrs. Coppice had been made very uncomfortable by something the gipsey had said, and so much did her disquietude increase, that at last she unburthened her mind to Nelly Scott, who laughed heartily at the confession.

But Mrs. Binney continued to come and go, and had more than once occasion to exercise her mysterious calling, until Oswald told his mamma that he had seen Scott having her fortune told, and then Mrs. Barnard begged of her brother to forbid the old woman the house, or at least during the remaining few days of their visit. Of course Mr. Deering complied, and a ragged boy henceforth became the messenger from the tents.

The day of departure arrived, and Mr. Barnard, in a short but eloquent speech, took farewell of his hospitable brother-in-law, not, however, without exacting a promise from him that Falernian Villa should be made happy by his presence, as soon as

the fruitful cornfields had yielded up their treasures, and all that, and autumn had put on the sere and yellow leaf.

"Yes, I'll come — I promise," replied Mr. Deering, "and now — you've no time to spare, I fancy, as this up-train is very punctual."

Mrs. Barnard again hugged her brother, and kissed his cheek. We are not sure whether she received one in return. Barnard shook Deering warmly by the hand, whilst Oswald would say good-bye to no one, but was lifted into his place in the phaeton in a frenzy of grief, because they could not take the pony up to town with them.

Nelly Scott took an affectionate leave of her fellows, but would look only once in the direction where Mr. Deering was standing.

All was ready for the start, when Mr. Deering called out —

"Louisa, what colour did you say the parlour curtains should be?"

"Oh, either amber or a full blue, eh, Scott? Scott thinks blue, and so do I."

Deering nodded his head, and the party for London went on their way to the station.

CHAPTER IV.

It was harvest-home at Hartsden. The well-filled bays of the great barn were dressed out with green boughs and autumn flowers, whilst on the floor, which in good time would resound with the blows of the flail, were placed long tables covered with white cloths and huge joints, and the implements — horn-handled knives and two-pronged forks — needful for their consumption. Mugs and horn beakers were there also, soon to be filled from the half-dozen kilderkins of harvest beer piled in the corner. Ralph Deering's seat of honour was arched over with flowers and green leaves, and the places of his farmer guests were only distinguished from those of his work-people by having chairs instead of forms. Hanging like a chandelier from the centre beam of the barn was an empty twelve dozen wine hamper as a warning to the merrymakers about to assemble that no one was to be "drunk on the premises," it having long been the custom at Hartsden to consign any offender to "the cage," as it was called, and there leave him to be a spectator of the concluding festivities. This proceeding was, doubtless, an infraction of the liberty of the subject, but Ralph Deering was lord of Hartsden. Just outside the barn was erected a large tent, formed of rick-

cloths, and to be lighted up when the sun went down, for an hour or two's dancing, Master always leading off the ball.

Such homely festivities are somewhat out of fashion now-a-days; more the pity, say we, believing that such kindly recognitions of those who have ploughed, and sown, and garnered in the harvest, are regarded as a very large additional per centage upon their wages.

Two days after the harvest-home Mr. Deering presented himself at Falernian Villa. He had been expected, and Mr. Barnard was at home to receive him with all the warmth of an expectant legatee. Mrs. Barnard was also ready with her sisterly hug — cold as the embrace of a Polar bear, Deering thought it, — and Oswald, darling boy! having received the avuncular kiss, displayed his interest in his uncle's arrival by asking abruptly, "Have you brought the pony?"

On being assured that no such intention had been entertained by his uncle, Oswald burst into a roar of vexation, and ran off to tell Scott.

Mr. Deering was a very crafty man, or he would not have made this visit to Falernian Villa. As it was he did not make himself as agreeable as he might have done. He frequently found an excuse to be absent from Barnard's dinner parties, remaining in his own room, or joining Oswald in the nursery. He would never dine out, even when the invitations were extended to him, but sought his own amusements at home and abroad. He deranged the order of the house by rising early, and sometimes

smoking before breakfast. He had even been so inconsiderate as to join the groom and footman at quoits in the little paddock behind the stables, and Scott had asked permission to go out twice in the month, no doubt, as Mrs. Barnard said, because Ralph would intrude in the nursery.

The termination of his visit was hailed, therefore, with great satisfaction by the Barnards, if we except Oswald, who had taken to his uncle very much, owing to the kindness he had shown him at Hartsden, and the many presents he had made him during his stay at the Villa.

It was a day of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, therefore, with Master Oswald when Mr. Deering returned to Hartsden. Indeed, so inconsolable was the young gentleman for days after, that even Scott's good nature could not endure any longer, and to Mrs. Barnard's surprise that any one could not bear with her spoilt boy, Scott gave warning. It was more than a week before Mrs. Barnard's indignation would permit her to make any inquiries concerning Scott's future, and she was then amused — yes, positively amused — to find that her maid was about to become under-governess in a cheap girls' school in the country.

It was quite true, nevertheless, and in due time Scott — not without some tears on her part at leaving Oswald — took her departure from Falernian Villa.

A little incident occurred the day after Scott "gave warning" which, as it may have an influence on our story, should be related.

John Knight did not settle in Jersey so soon as he had expected, and when he wrote his promised letter he, lovingly no doubt, addressed it to "Miss Scott, at Mrs. Barnard's, Falernian Villa." It chanced to arrive on the morning after Nelly's resignation, and the postman, on his way to the house, was met in the garden by Mrs. Barnard. On reading the superscription of John Knight's letter Mrs. Barnard's face coloured, and then she returned it to the postman, saying, sharply,

"Not here — we have no *Miss* Scott staying at my house. — Never had."

The postman touched his hat, received the letter, endorsed it "Not known as directed," and returned it to the post office.

Mr. Deering was a strange, inconsistent man, as well as a crafty man. Although he had satisfied himself that his sister's motive in effecting a reconciliation was entirely a selfish one, and but for his money and the lands of Hartsden, he might have lived on, a lonely man, to the end of his days, he had noted down all her suggestions for the improvement of the Old Place, and soon after her departure had commenced carrying them into effect. The dressing-room and *boudoir* were added to the great bed-chamber, the latticed panes were removed from the bay-windows and plate glass substituted in their place; and as soon as the new year had come a London upholsterer had been sent for to Hartsden, to receive orders for much new furniture and the renovation of the old.

"What colour, sir, shall we say for the curtains?" asked the upholsterer. "I should advise a warm maroon ——"

"No — I've thought of that," replied Deering, with a smile; "I should prefer a full blue."

"Certainly — will look charming," said the upholsterer, "and gimp trimming, of course?"

"I leave the rest to you, only let all be ready by the middle of June, or as much earlier as you please," replied Deering.

The upholsterer promised and kept his time, for a wonder, so that when Mrs. Barnard wrote to remind Ralph that she looked to visiting him again in June, she was answered by the following post to this effect: —

DEAR LOUISA,

Yours safely to hand; but I should not have forgotten my promise, depend upon it, — I always mean what I say. I have had the house done up, as it was not to your liking before; and I hope you will enjoy your stay here, though I shall be away. I have promised a friend of mine to go to France for a month or six weeks; and as it's more convenient to go now than later in the year, we shall start about the first. That won't make any difference to you and Barnard and my nephew, as Coppice will have the keys of the cellar, and the horses and pony will be at your service all the same. The house will be ready for you on the 18th; and so,

with love and respects, believe me —— (Mrs. Scott had written "attached sister,")

Your attached brother,

RALPH DEERING.

HARTSDEN,

May 28th, 18—.

"Well, Ralph is an oddity!" thought Mrs. Barnard, "and better away, perhaps, or we might quarrel again. If he has done the place up as he says, I shall ask the Clappertons, and the Graingers, and the Axteds, to come down for a week; that'll fill out the time, and we owe them all some civility."

Mr. Barnard was also pleased with the prospect of having Hartsden to themselves, as he could then "work off some of his clients, who thought much of spending a day or two in the country at a family mansion, free of expense."

So Mr. Deering was thanked, and his good angel entreated to procure him *un bon voyage*, and a safe return.

Although Mr. Barnard was no niggard of his wine when entered for "home consumption," he was chary enough of it in Gog Lane, as there, very properly, "business was business." But Barnard was not a shabby man, and therefore, as he intended to put Hartsden some way to business purposes, he selected from his own cellars enough of his choice vintages to stock three or four large hampers, besides a case or two of champagne, and a few bottles of very rare old cognac for the entertainment of his intended visitors.

As Mrs. Barnard, also, intended to receive company at Hartsden, a milliner and dress-maker were turned on, with unlimited assistant power, and Mr. Barnard had the satisfaction of seeing the spacious hall of Falernian Villa half filled with packages.

On the day appointed, the Barnards and their baggage, — numbered from one to seventeen not including the bird-cage and dressing-cases, — were safely deposited at the Old Place at Hartsden, to the undisguised consternation of Mrs. Coppice, and the rest of Mr. Deering's limited household.

The alterations which had been made during the past twelve months were certainly improvements, and gave a more cheerful appearance to the interior of the house, and Mrs. Barnard could not help congratulating herself on the success of her diplomacy.

"I had no idea," she said to her astonished husband, "that Ralph could have been so easily bamboozled. He has adopted all my suggestions, I see, even to the colour of the curtains. It will be our own fault, Barnard, if we don't manage him as we please for the future."

"Highly probable," replied Mr. Barnard; "and I shall leave you to do it. With your tact and — all that, I have no doubt but Oswald may look upon Hartsden as his own."

A week had passed, and the Clappertons were expected on the following Tuesday, when a letter from Mr. Deering to his sister was brought by the post. It bore the London postmark, and Mrs. Barnard was somewhat surprised to find that her brother had

not left England for the Continent, whither she had thought he had gone at least ten days before.

She opened the envelope, and took out a sheet of note-paper, to which was affixed four lines cut from a newspaper.

Having read them, this usually imperturbable woman went off into a swoon. Mr. Barnard rang for assistance — not, however, until he had read the brief extract which had produced such a singular result; and, whilst he and others are engaged in restoring Mrs. Barnard to consciousness, we will take a flight to another part of the country.

In the lap of a valley in mid-Sussex lies — almost asleep — a little village, which we will call Fittleworth. As seen from the birch woods which surmount a neighbouring rise, the tops of the houses only are visible, if we except the time-worn Grange, lying surrounded by its girdle of trees. A semi-circular range of hills, whose steepness is defined by the white roads which scar their surface, half enclose the valley through which the river Arun flows brightly and swiftly. Clumps of trees, some growing upon knolls, others on the level plain, a large stretch of undulating ground covered with furze, heather, and ferns, ending in a common, on which a veritable Maypole rears its head, give diversity to the scene. Several half-hidden dwellings attract the eye by the filmy wreaths of smoke ascending from them, though it is June, but the wind blows coldly, and masses of heavy grey clouds are gathering in the south, dashed here and there with fleecy fire, reflected from the sun, setting behind the western hills. There are

large openings in those grey clouds, showing through the intense blue of heaven, and here and there what seem huge mountains of snow glowing with the rosy sunlight.

On this June evening a young lady was seated on a felled tree at the entrance of Birch Wood, and not in the least regarding the beautiful scene before her, but deeply interested in some idle story, such, perhaps, as is this.

She was not a native of Fittleworth, but had come some three weeks before to stay at the only hostelrie in the village, "The Swan." The gentleman who had accompanied her on her arrival had had a previous interview with Mrs. Hawkins, the hostess of "The Swan," and preparations had been made, therefore, for this unusual guest. The gentleman left within half-an-hour of her coming, and when he did so, he kissed the lady fondly, — so fondly that he might have been a father parting from a daughter.

"The Swan," though only a village roadside inn, was a marvel in its way. The one sitting-room was plainly furnished, its chief ornaments being the row of blooming flowers filling the long sill of the latticed window. But the bed-room was large enough to have been a royal chamber, had it not been stinted in its growth upwards. And then the cleanliness of its white dimity hangings, and snowy counterpane, dotted all over with floral and other vagaries of the weaver, the equally white toilet-cover, and cobwebless ceiling, gave assurance that "no unclean thing had power to abide there."

There were flowers also in the window, in red pots and many-patterned saucers, each plant worthy of the prize for window-gardening.

Who, seeing Mrs. Hawkins, could doubt that matters could be otherwise at "The Swan"?

Portly, as a hostess should be; busy from morning till night, as a good hostess must be; good-humoured, ready to please, punctual at all times, as Mrs. Hawkins invariably was, — combined to make her an exception to most persons of her class. It is, therefore, no wonder that the strange young lady felt herself at ease at "The Swan," where she had been living many days. Not so the villagers of Fittleworth. From the day following the coming of the young lady, the whole female population of the place had been in a ferment. Who was she? Where did she come from? So strange to be at "The Swan" day after day alone. Why didn't somebody come to see her? She *had* letters — that the post-mistress owned, but not one passed from her in reply. As for Mrs. Hawkins, she ought to be ashamed of herself to treat old friends and neighbours as she did — pretending not to know whom she was entertaining, or, if she did, keeping her knowledge to herself. Wait until she wanted help in her house, and see who amongst her gossips would lend it! But neither Mrs. Hawkins nor her worthy spouse could be brought to admit that they suspected a mystery.

The young lady, we have said, was seated on a felled tree, apparently insensible to the beauty around and above her — for all was beautiful, feebly as

our word-painting has depicted the scene — when a voice she well knew called her name. She sprang up, and ran to embrace the speaker. He was the same gentleman who had been her conductor to “The Swan.”

“All right at last, dear girl, and to-morrow —”

The person addressed held down her head.

“— Yes, to-morrow morning my lawyer will be here with the papers for signature. Another kiss, dear, for that good news,” said the gentleman, and without waiting for an answer, he took a good hearty smack.

The lady and gentleman then sat down upon the felled tree, and talked for some time together — yes, like lovers.

What they said, we care not to record; although sprawling on his back, on a perfect bed of wild flowers, out of sight but not out of earshot, was a gipsy lad, watching a wire which he had placed over a rabbit-hole. The ill-mannered fellow listened until the conversation seemed drawing to a close, and then, when the gentleman talked of returning to the neighbouring post-town, the lad crawled noiselessly to recover his snare, and, having secured it, started off like a lurcher to the tents of his kindred, pitched in one corner of the common. The lad was nearly breathless when he got to them, and with difficulty gasped out —

“*Mami! Mami!** Come out of the *tschata***; there’s *rûp*,*** if not *sonnikey*,† on the road.”

* Grandmother,

** Tent.

*** Silver.

† Gold.

"What's the *tscharwo** mean?" asked an old woman, coming from the tent. We have already been introduced to her in the green lane at Hartsden.

"There's the pretty *tsche*** that came to our old pitch at Hartslye, last summer," said the lad.

"*Me twhana!*"*** replied the old gipsey, instantly taking the road with the lad, and talking as they went. "What's to come of that?"

"*Rûp* or *sonnikey*, for who d'ye think's her *roman?*"†

"Squire Deering?" said the woman, half interrogatively.

"*Latscho*,†† *Mami!* and he's sweethearting her," replied the boy, laughing. "They're to *luno*††† soon, I thinks; but he leaves her just now, and she'll come home alone down the beech walks."

"*Me twhana*," replied the old woman. "Wait for me ayond the Grange barn, whiles me meet my pretty lady at the gate."

Not much mystery now, if the gipsey lad was not mistaken.

The young lady started when she saw the gipsey woman curtseying at the gate; but, approaching nearer, she recognised an old acquaintance in Mrs. Binney.

"Why, Mrs. Binney, as I live!" said Miss Scott. "Who would have thought of meeting you here?"

"Fittleworth, my lady, is an old pitch of my people," replied the gipsey; "but me come 'cos me

* Boy.

† Companion.

** Lady.

†† Good!

*** I know.

††† Marry.

knowed I'd meet you to-night, before the stars was out. Show me your hand."

"Oh, not here!" said Miss Scott. "I don't want my fortune told, — at least, not now."

"Didn't me tell you what was to come about? Didn't me tell you you was to marry a rich husband, and have your carriages and horses, and a fine house, and isn't it come to pass?"

"Not quite," said Miss Scott, smiling.

"But it will, and that before the new *schan* there is a week old. Show me your hand, my lady. — Yes — it's all as me told you; you will be a married lady afore the moon wanes."

"Well!" said Miss Scott, getting rather frightened.

"You'll marry the man who loved you afore you loved him. You will go to a house where you never lived but once afore. You'll be missus where you was maid — all as I told you in the garden at Hartsden —"

"You did, Mrs. Binney; I own it. And perhaps if you had not —"

"You'd not thought such a lucky fortune was to come to you, my pretty lady. I knew it would be, 'cos it must be; and as

' *Maru* (bread) is the staff of life,
So is your luck to be a wife.'

The Squire will make a good *romany*."

"You certainly first set my thoughts on Mr. Deering that night in the garden, but I could not believe you spoke truly —"

"But me did, you see; and me speak true agin. Do me not, my lady?"

"Well, Mrs. Binney, you do," answered Miss Scott, — "to-morrow I am to be married. Mr. Deering and his lawyer will be here in the morning, as I am to have three hundred a year settled on me for life."

Mrs. Binney held up her hands; but recollecting, we suppose, that she ought to have known of the dowry, she muttered, rapidly, "*Ick, Doj, Trin, Schutar!*"* to the alarm, rather, of Miss Scott. After a short pause Mrs. Binney inquired, "Why marry at this place, and not at Hartsden, my lady?"

"Well, Mr. Deering wishes to surprise his sister; and so I have been staying the necessary twenty-one days to allow me to be married here," replied Miss Scott. "You will see us come out of church; but, as we shall go straight to the railway, there's a sovereign for you to make merry."

Mrs. Binney took the money, and kissed it, and having pocketed the coin, uttered some gipsy words, rapidly, which being translated were to the effect, that if Miss Scott and Mr. Deering expected to buy her off for a sovereign they were miserably mistaken. Mami Binney, however, let Miss Scott pass on, and having watched her take the road to the Swan, gave a shrill squeak, which brought her grandson from his hiding-place, and then, by a motion of her hand, sent him on the trail of the unsuspecting bride of the morrow.

Miss Scott had scarcely finished her breakfast

* One, two, three, four.

on the following morning when Mr. Deering arrived with his lawyer, Mr. Dalton, from London. The marriage settlement had been properly prepared and, when signed, was duly witnessed by Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins. And then the fly which had brought the gentlemen was ordered forth to take the bridal party to church, their connubial intentions being utterly unsuspected by the Fittleworthians.

"Dalton," said Deering, *sotto voce*, as they rode along, "I have taken this roundabout way of getting married because I did not care to have another row with my self-seeking sister. Secondly, because — I want to pay her off for old scores, now that I know she would rather see me in Hartsden churchyard than anywhere else."

Mr. Dalton had nothing to say against Mr. Deering's mode of proceeding — the more especially as Miss Scott was present and they were at the entrance to the church, where the clerk was waiting to receive them at the door.

In about half-an-hour Ralph Deering and Nelly Scott were canonically one, with only Mr. Dalton to offer the usual congratulations after the ceremony. When, however, the bridegroom had handed his bride into the fly, he felt a slight tug at the tail of his coat, and looking to see who had made the appeal to his attention, he was surprised to find old Mami Binney.

"Lor, bless me!" cried Mr. Deering, "you here, and to-day, too? Well, that is strange, sure enough! I suppose I must cross your hand with something

more than a bit of silver for luck, for you laid the first springe that caught my bonnie bird here."

Whatever Mr. Deering gave to Mami we know not, but it was sufficient to insure him the prayers — such as they were — of the whole tribe of the Binneys.

Mr. Deering and his youthful bride went their way to London, accompanied by Mr. Dalton; and when a few days had been spent in seeing some of the lions of the great metropolis, the happy pair started for Paris, Mr. Deering having considerately cut out from the *Times* the announcement of his marriage, and enclosed it to his sister, fearing, possibly, that the newspaper might not find its way to Hartsden.

When Mrs. Barnard recovered her senses, her rage and indignation were tremendous, and she gave utterance to so much un-sisterly invective, that poor Mr. Barnard found it unnecessary to make an observation.

To re-pack and abandon for ever the dishonoured house at Hartsden was instantly decided on, and forthwith put into execution.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN June came round again, a baby-voice was heard in Old Place at Hartsden, and Ralph Deering forgot the ten lonely years which he had passed, in the pleasant dreams of the future which came with his little Mildred. He had told Mr. Barnard that he would long to make Hartsden more of a home than it had been, and Mr. Barnard had assured him that sister Louisa would help to make it so. Both had kept their promise. How greatly Mrs. Barnard had contributed to that consummation we have seen, and her mortification at the part she had unwittingly played was extreme.

"The duplicity of that wretch!" said the defeated diplomatist to her husband. "To have adopted all my suggestions for the improvement of Hartsden, only to gratify that double-faced creature, Scott!"

"A serpent, my dear — a serpent whom, you may say, you warmed in your bosom!" exclaimed Mr. Barnard.

"Don't say that again, Barnard. She was too much beneath me ever to have been warmed in my bosom —" but Mrs. Barnard recollected how Scott had been employed once upon a time in letter-writing, and did not doubt but she had told Mr. Deering the circumstance — which she had, of course.

"To think that you should have been so fooled by that fellow!" said Barnard. "I shall always consider that he has swindled Oswald out of his birthright!"

"Poor dear!" replied Mrs. Barnard; "after buying that pony, and pretending to be so fond of him. I see it all now! The darling was only made use of that his vile uncle and that creature might be together, without creating any suspicion of what was going on."

"I consider it infamous!" said Barnard. "I call it seething a kid in its mother's milk." Mr. B. was not always happy in his metaphors.

"I will never forgive him! Never! Never!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnard. "And think how the Clapertons, and the Axteds, and everybody, will talk at a connexion of mine marrying my maid!"

"We can say, my dear, she was our governess."

"We can't say anything of the kind; I always called her my maid! A deceitful creature! Mind you don't say she was anything else."

"Certainly not! certainly not!" said Barnard, finding he was not improving his wife's temper. "And now I recollect, wasn't there some story about Scott and the carpenter who went to Jersey—?"

"Yes — at least Oswald said so," replied Mrs. Barnard; and then, recollecting that the letter which she had returned to the postman in the garden bore the Jersey postmark, the diplomatist began to think that possibly it would have been better to have allowed that intercepted despatch to have reached its destination.

It was clear that every manœuvre of Mrs. Barnard's to bamboozle her brother had contributed to her own discomfiture, and, like the unskilful engineer, she had been "hoist with her own petard."

John Knight had received back his love-letter, and wondered much at the postman's endorsement, but having heard somewhat and read somewhat of the fickleness of women, he concluded that Nelly Scott "was like the rest of her sex, and so she should hear no more of him." John Knight did not know what he was talking about, as who can foreknow his future, be he king or carpenter?

Mrs. Deering was not much out of place at Hartsden, as, in point of education, she was on an equality with most of the farmers' wives with whom she associated; as Oswald's governess, her social position, also, was in no way inferior. Indeed, her former condition and early experiences made her life happier than it might have been, as Mr. Deering was not particularly ardent in his conjugal demonstrations, and sometimes treated his wife very much like an upper servant. He rarely consulted her wishes or convenience in their domestic proceedings, and continued to live much the same free and easy life that he had done before his marriage. Mrs. Nelly contented herself with the reflection that his previous loneliness had made such a course habitual, and as there was no violent love on either side to consider or offend, matters went smoothly enough at Hartsden, at least for some years.

Mrs. Deering's principal difficulty was with Mrs. Coppice, who very reluctantly resigned the control

of the household, which she had exercised ever since the death of the first Mrs. Deering.

"It's hard, uncommon hard," she said to Coppice, "to give up to one who's been; one may say, a fellow-servant, for as to gov'ness and all that, she was lady's-maid here, and no better, and how master come to marry her — well — I say it's hard, uncommon!"

Coppice was considerate enough to assent to what his wife said, but he was also wise enough to see that if they wished to keep their still comfortable berths at Hartsden, they must submit to fate, and acknowledge the supremacy of the "new missus."

Mrs. Nelly had lived long enough in the servants' hall to know the meaning of Mrs. Coppice's occasional huffishness, and, with more consideration than a less experienced mistress would have shown, she affected not to observe it, until, by exercising moderation in the assumption of her new supremacy, Mrs. Nelly brought Mrs. Coppice into very fair subjection, although the yoke never sat easily on her neek, — not after she had worn it for years.

The real mistress of Hartsden was little Mildred. Her pretty blue eyes almost always smiling, like her rosy mouth; her silky hair, which grew in natural ringlets, through which her father loved to pass his fingers; her graceful form; her merry laugh and voice, like music, gave her a power over Deering's heart, and Nelly's also, which made Miss Mildred lady paramount at Hartsden.

Mr. Deering called Mildred "a little angel," but she had an inheritance besides Hartsden, which, when

she came into possession of it, proved her to be only a woman. For a time Mrs. Deering's teaching was considered sufficient for Mildred, who had a child's natural aversion to be instructed, and to the restraint of "school;" so, when the weather was fine enough for play, or a ride with papa, or — or — or anything else which could be made a plea for shirking the nasty books, Miss Mildred was excused from her duties.

It was not until she was nearly fourteen that Mildred took resolutely to learning, as then she began to be ashamed of her deficiencies, when discovered by her playfellows. One lad, Percy Clendon, a pupil at the Vicarage, had much to do in stimulating the little dunce to exertion, though he himself was distinguished for quickness of parts and deficiency of application.

"Percy is a quick lad," the Vicar would say, "but unstable as water. Soon tires of any pursuit, and small difficulties frighten him. I'm afraid, with all his cleverness and good qualities, he will not be a thriving man."

But, your reverence, the boy is not always father to the man, and there are other teachers "in that rough school called the world," beside schoolmasters.

As Mildred had frequently to confess her ignorance of subjects with which Percy expressed his surprise she should be unacquainted, and a feeling of shame made her resolve to attend more assiduously to her studies, in a short time she required a more advanced instructress than her mother, and a governess was therefore engaged.

Percy Clendon was a fine, interesting lad, and a great favourite with the Vicar, who had undertaken his nurture and education (for a consideration), as Percy was an orphan, with the moderate expectancy of some three thousand pounds. He could run well, jump well, was a first-rate short leg and wicket-keeper, and could ride well, as Whitefoot, the Vicar's capital cob, discovered, soon after Percy's advent at Hartslye. Whitefoot was just in the prime of his life, and had grown sleek and fat in the performance of his easy clerical duties. He was much given to hay, and dozing in his well-littered stall, and had lost all ambition as to his paces. He was greatly disturbed, therefore, when a saddle was one day placed upon his back, and its girths drawn unpleasantly tight. When Percy mounted him, Whitefoot resented the imposition, and performed a series of gyrations until he was almost giddy. But the active persuasion of Percy's heels, and a few sharp cuts from a whip, induced Whitefoot at last to start off at an easy trot, which he occasionally endeavoured to vary by relapses into a walk. Percy's persuasion, however, compelled him to resume his trot, until they came to a long strip of elastic turf by the roadside, when Whitefoot, finding resistance useless, was forced into a moderate canter. A continuance of this treatment being persevered in day after day, Sundays excepted, Whitefoot got into such excellent condition, that he became perfectly demoralised, and never could put his hoofs on a piece of green turf, but he bent down his head, and went off at a pace that satisfied even the ardent Percy. Whitefoot was

of a good stock, and proved it one day, when he and his rider came upon the hounds, and ran with them in first-rate style to the finish, to the delight of Percy, Whitefoot, and Mr. Deering, who was very fond of the boy. The Vicar, who was a good man, and kind to his beast, ought, perhaps, to have remonstrated with his pupil, but when at college he had often worn pink, and still loved in his heart "the noble science," though he thought it no longer decorous to follow it.

With such an accomplished horseman Mr. Deering considered his darling Mildred was perfectly safe, and many a pleasant ride the youngsters had together. Sometimes through the shady woods, scaring with their merry laughter the birds in the trees, and the timid creatures in the underwood. Sometimes down the green lanes, when the hedgerows, garnished with their wild flowers, almost rivalled the trim beds at the Old Place. O those happy, pleasant rides, never to be forgotten! Never by one at least, perhaps not by either.

Mildred Deering's fifteenth birthday was to be kept at Hartsden as a great holiday; and her dearest friend, Jessie Dalton, had come down a fortnight before to help direct the needful preparations which were already weighing on the mind of Mrs. Coppice, and robbing her of early rest, and making her a late riser.

Jessie Dalton was one year older than Mildred, equally fair, but somewhat more womanly. Jessie, poor girl, was motherless (her father's housekeeper was an aunt, whose acquaintance we shall make pre-

sently), and she usually visited Hartsden at Midsummer and Christmas, Mildred being always delighted with her companionship. Mildred had not as yet returned these visits, as Mr. Deering hated London; and to have parted from his darling for any length of time was a matter not to be thought of.

Therefore Jessie had tales of London life which seemed like stories of fairy-land to her country friend, although the lawyer's daughter only visited the professional acquaintance and clients of her father, going now and then to the play, and once to the Opera. Yet what wondrous and strange stories were made out of these limited experiences by the town mouse to the country one; and how Mildred plagued her indulgent father into a promise that next Christmas — as soon as Christmas Day was over — she should go with mamma, or without mamma, to spend a whole month with Jessie Dalton. O, how happy the two friends were at this prospective holiday!

Upon one point only had Jessie and Mildred any difference of agreement, and that was on a matter wherein it might be thought that but one opinion could exist.

Percy Clendon was the subject of difference. Whilst Mildred was always ready to praise him — to speak of him as a kind, good brother, Jessie declared him to be a rude, presuming cub — yes, cub — who was thoroughly spoiled by his conceit, and by the consideration shown to him by all at Hartsden. It is true that Percy and Jessie had continual tiffs, and upon one occasion their quarrel be-

came so serious that they did not speak for some days.

Jessie had called Percy a little puppy, and he had made an attempt at a small spiteful pun, and told her she should have been named "Jezabel."

Mildred was greatly grieved at this quarrel between her friends, but they were soon to be reconciled through her.

A ride had been proposed, and Jessie had refused to be of the party. Mildred was vexed at her friend's obstinacy, as she called it, and being herself unused to give way on any matter which pleased her, Mildred decided to go alone with Percy.

After they had ridden some short time, Mildred said:

"I wish, Percy, you would not quarrel so with Jessie. I don't like it."

"I don't begin," replied Percy, warmly; "she is always saying something rude to me, cocking up her pug nose. She thinks to crow over us down here because she has danced at the Drysalters' Ball, and been two or three times to a pantomime. I've seen a pantomime, come to that, years ago, when I was quite a boy."

"Well, I don't think it kind of you, Percy," said Mildred, "and I have come to-day almost on purpose to tell you so."

"O, very well!" replied Percy, his voice what is called "choky." "If you turn on her side — if you turn against me —"

"I don't, Percy! You ought to be sure I don't,"

said Mildred, quite earnestly. "But do be a good boy, and be friends with Jessie."

"All right," said Percy, "I am friends, and so we will drop the subject. See there! There's a capital bit of turf on the other side of the hedge; what say you to a spin? We shall come out by Hartslye church."

"Oh, I daren't attempt to jump that hedge," said Mildred; "Rocket would never do it even if I could keep my seat."

"Oh, that's nonsense. But, see! here's a gap, and only a bit of a ditch on the other side. You can jump that! Whitefoot would do it on three legs."

Percy put the cob at the jump, and was over in a moment. Rocket, accustomed to follow Whitefoot, turned short round, somewhat disturbing Mildred's seat, and made a clumsy lunge at the gap. Mildred, greatly frightened, checked the pony in his stride by a sharp pull on her rein, and in a moment both were in the ditch, poor Mildred undermost. When Percy saw the consequence of his imprudence, he was almost paralysed; but being a plucky lad, he soon recovered himself, dismounted, and went to Mildred's assistance. She was in great peril! She was lying on her face, one crutch of the side-saddle pressing on her back, and any effort of Rocket to rise would endanger her. With great presence of mind Percy cut the girths of the side-saddle, and so lessened Mildred's chance of injury. He then, at considerable risk to himself, drew the pony's fore legs from under it, and placed them on the edge of the ditch.

This accession of power gave the animal courage to attempt to rise, and after one or two struggles Percy was relieved by seeing Rocket on his legs.

"Mildred, dear Mildred! are you hurt?" cried Percy, kneeling down by the poor girl's head.

"I'm afraid so — much hurt, I'm afraid. My back!"

"Oh, no! I cut away the saddle. Try to rise."

"I can't! Oh, do not move me; I cannot bear it!" and Mildred's face grew very white, whilst tears flowed from her eyes.

"What can I do! what can I do!" cried Percy. "I see no one near. Hallo! Hallo!"

"Ride home! you cannot help me, dear boy. Ride home, and — they will have to carry me."

Before almost Mildred had done speaking, Percy had caught and mounted Whitefoot, who again took the hedge; and Rocket, lightened of his burthen, now cleared it easily. Percy tried the mettle of the cob, and though he reached Hartsden in a few minutes, Whitefoot had never seemed to go so slowly; but his panting sides and moving nostrils, told how severe had been the pace.

The consternation at Hartsden was extreme. Percy could hardly make himself understood at first from agitation and grief; but it was conjectured by all that some accident had befallen Mildred.

"Some come with me — she will have to be carried — send for the doctor. Where are the men — down yonder?" and without waiting for a reply, or further question, Percy ran down to the home-

stead and collected four of the men, who having obtained a light hurdle, followed Percy to the scene of the disaster.

Mrs. Deering and Mrs. Coppice had reached Mildred when Percy and the others arrived, and the sight of the weeping women and the suffering girl was too much for the innocent cause of the accident, and he sank down upon the grass, over-powered by a feeling akin to death. He was still conscious; he could hear the buzz of voices, and once, and once again, he heard a cry of pain from Mildred!

Gently the rough hands of the labourers placed their young mistress on the rude litter which Mrs. Deering and her servant had covered with part of their own garments, and then they bore Mildred homewards — a new sorrow for the Old Place. On their way they met the doctor who, after one or two brief questions, and the administration of a stimulant, ordered the men to proceed whilst he walked by Mildred's side, holding her hand, and now and then applying a restorative as he felt the pulse varying under his touch.

When Mildred had been carried to her chamber the doctor soon confirmed certain conclusions at which he had arrived, and decided without waiting for Mr. Deering's authority, to send a messenger instantly to London for one of the most eminent surgeons of the day — so serious was the injury Mildred had received, — no doubt from the crutch of the saddle when the pony fell.

"Is she in danger?" asked Mrs. Deering.

"It would be useless to deceive you," replied

the doctor; "I fear there is great injury to the spine, and if so — there must be danger."

Mrs. Deering cried piteously.

"Much depends," continued the doctor, "on quiet, Mrs. Deering; and I must ask you to leave the room, at least until you are more composed."

But Mrs. Deering promised to control herself if she might remain, and by great effort she did so.

Mr. Deering had gone to market; but from some strange feeling, — he could not define it, — he resisted joining the market table, and hastened home. Others we have known who have experienced this indefinable presentiment of evil, happily not always realised. Before he reached Hartsden he met his servant on the way to the Station, and from him he learned what had happened. Deering did not wait to question the man, but, striking his spurs into his horse, rode — almost a madman — to his house. He dismounted, and without waiting for any one to take his horse, rushed into the house, exclaiming, "Where is she! Where is my child!" and was with difficulty restrained by the doctor from entering Mildred's room, and possibly destroying the small chance of restoration which seemed to be remaining.

He was quieted after a time: and having thanked the doctor for his promptness in sending for assistance, begged of him to return to Mildred, as though he thought his child would be safer if the doctor were with her. How many of his acres — how much out of his full granaries and stock-yards would

Deering not have given if that man who had just left him could have returned and promised life to Mildred, and proved the truthfulness of his words! How all that he possessed passed out of his mind! The only thing of value to him lay in the chamber above his head, and if she were to be taken from him he had nothing left to live for. For a moment or two he thought that the deception he had practised on his sister had been wrong, and that this accident to Mildred was connected with it; and then the intensity of his anxiety for his child took entire possession of him and he thought only of her.

No one had noticed or thought of Percy. As soon as the sensation of sickness had passed away, and the cold, clammy sweat had been succeeded by a heat almost as painful to bear, Percy rose, and more from impulse than reflection, walked as well as he could towards Hartsden. As he leaned upon the garden gate he was again almost powerless, fearing to enter the house and hear that Mildred was dead. But he noticed that one of the blinds of her room was partly up, and that gave him hope and courage. He reached the stone steps leading to the hall, and paused again. He tried to review all that had passed, and then hoped that his thoughtlessness was scarcely criminal. There was no one in the hall, and he opened the door of the dining-room and entered. There was only Mr. Deering — seated, with his head resting on his extended arms, and sobbing aloud.

Poor Percy burst into tears, and then, running to the sorrowing man, threw his arms about him.

"Oh, Mr. Deering! dear Mr. Deering, forgive me for what I have done!"

Deering started up, shaking the boy from him, and raised his clenched hand as though about to strike him.

"Damn you!" he exclaimed, after a moment's pause. "How dare you come here! You've killed her, you scoundrel. Get out of my house, and never enter it again ——"

Percy was too much terrified to speak; he could only look imploringly in Deering's face, and shake his head. But Deering had no other words than such as we have written down and care not to repeat.

Percy covered his face with his hands and, weeping bitterly, left the house.

The Vicar had been much alarmed at the return of Whitefoot without Percy, and was greatly distressed when his pupil came home, overpowered by grief and shame. The Vicar having heard all that had happened had to strive some time before he could comfort poor Percy, although he proved logically by the Law of Forces, and Budd's "Theory of Instinct," that the mischief was purely accidental, or if blame attached anywhere it was to Rocket. The Vicar also promised, after a day or two, to speak to Mr. Deering, and had no doubt but all would be well again.

The London surgeon happily took a more favourable view of Mildred's injury than the family doctor had done, but pronounced the mischief to be very serious, and likely to leave some permanent dis-

ability. To ensure even that result Mildred would need great care, and skilful nursing.

The Vicar kept his word to Percy, and Mr. Deering came over to the Vicarage to see the boy.

"Percy, you must forgive me, like a good lad as you are," said Deering; "but I was almost mad with sorrow when I spoke so cross — so wickedly to you."

Percy could not answer, but made some peculiar grimaces by which he sought to keep back his tears and express his gratification.

"You can't see Mildred just at present — they will hardly let me speak to her; but when she sits up you shall, Percy. It's a bad job, but no fault of yours."

And so Mildred had said whenever she had spoken of the occurrence. As soon as she was permitted to see strangers she requested that Percy should be sent for, that she might tell him she acquitted him of all blame; and this she did in such gentle words that he, poor boy, kneeling by her bedside, could not help wetting her hand with his tears.

What a relief it was to Percy to hear her talk in her old voice again! To see her smile her former smile, though somewhat changed by the pain she had undergone, and still endured at times! She spoke of the pleasant rides, and walks, and games which they had had together, and of future plans, when all their past pleasures should be renewed. — Yes, when Mildred should be well enough to walk,

and to ride Rocket the blunderer. When would that be?

There was not an hour that Percy had to spare from his studies but he endeavoured to pass with Mildred. She was very fond of flowers, and Percy knew all her favourites and brought them, though there were none growing in the gardens at Hartsden, nor at the Vicarage either, — none nearer than at Cumberton Farm, four miles from the Old Place; Mildred knew this. Mildred had several pets that missed the gentle voice which had been accustomed to call them to be fed or caressed, and those Percy made his charge, for which kindness Mildred was thankful. Percy was a capital reader, and so was Jessie Dalton, and Mrs. Deering not amiss, but somehow or the other he never brought a dull or uninteresting book, while the others did very often. Could it be, as the Vicar suspected, that Percy sat up late and rose early to test the volumes before bringing them to Mildred?

Whitefoot began to get "fat and scant of breath" again, and to miss his invigorating gallop, as Percy cared not to ride alone, and Mildred made no progress towards being his companion again. No — none.

This considerate devotion to Mildred was not without its good effect upon her friend Jessie Dalton, who was at last brought to own that she had misunderstood Percy Clendon, who was "a good, kind-hearted boy." How pleased Mildred was to hear her say this, although Jessie had added, "I should not, however, care to live always where he was — he is so very sharp at times."

Mildred had never noticed it, except perhaps when Jessie had been the rubbing-stone.

A long, long year had passed away, and Mildred had taken no pleasant walk — no pleasant ride. The fresh air of heaven had not blown upon her cheek, except through the opened window of her bed-chamber, and the once lithe-moving girl still laid almost powerless upon a couch, so contrived that her recumbent position could be varied, without effort, by herself. If there was change in her, there was change also in her father. He always had a smile when speaking to her, but it fled from his face instantaneously, when he looked from her, even for a moment. Out of doors he walked with a bent back and unelastic step, as though he carried his sorrow like a heavy burthen. He rarely took his accustomed seat at the market table, and when he did so his former mirthfulness was only reached and retained by deep potations. There were no hospitable gatherings at Hartsden. No — they would wait a little while — wait till she was better, and then there should be “more cakes and ale,” and no end to the merriment. But Mildred did not gain strength, as her fond father had hoped, and three years had passed before the injured girl could walk across the lawn at Hartsden, and then by the aid of her father’s and her mother’s arms.

Whatever indulgence paternal love had put about Mildred when she was in health — the light, the joy of her father’s house — it was now more lavish, even to being unjust to the mother’s claims of consideration. Mr. Deering seemed to forget that he

had made Nelly Scott his wife, and thereby promoted her from her condition of servitude; and as his solicitude for Mildred caused him to be unmindful of the respect due to her, she had the bitter mortification to believe that her child had removed her from whatever place she might have had in her husband's heart, and that Mildred was Deering's one care! one thought!

During those three years Percy Clendon never relaxed in his attention to Mildred, and so touched was the sufferer by this self-sacrifice that one day she said to him,

"Percy, I shall call you brother! — and you shall call me sister. Let me hear you say 'sister Mildred.'"

And Percy called her "sister Mildred" then, and for years after.

CHAPTER VI.

BEDFORD Row had long enjoyed a legal reputation. Formerly, before fashion moved westward, Bedford Row had been occupied by retired merchants, and occasionally by a stray sprig of nobility. The houses were now generally let out as chambers, except where the proprietors elected to use the lower rooms as offices, and occupy the upper part of the house as the family residence. Mr. Dalton was of this number.

Since the death of Mrs. Dalton his domestic affairs had been superintended by a sister of the deceased lady, and a more conscientious, uncomfortable person than Miss Pragmore could not be found readily anywhere. She rang the servants' bell punctually at half-past six; at seven she expected the housemaid to come to her for the key of the front door; at eight to a minute breakfast was served; at nine the cook received an audience; at ten a general inspection of the house from attic to kitchen took place, and woe to the maid-servant or the manservant who had omitted one tittle of their duties. This clockwork exactness distinguished all Miss Pragmore's proceedings; and as the other duties of life were performed with the same strict observance of apple-pie order, one day became so like another,

that poor Jessie Dalton, as she grew into maidenhood, was never so happy as when away from home. Her father loved her very dearly, but he was always busy. Even at his breakfast he would open and read letters; his luncheon, a biscuit and a glass of sherry, was usually sent into the office; and his dinner, hurriedly dispatched when the family dined alone, was succeeded by the study of briefs, agreements, and such like professional matters.

Now and then Mr. Dalton would make holiday and take Jessie to the theatre, but these infrequent enjoyments would have been marred had Jessie cared for Miss Pragmore's opinions, as that uncomfortable lady was greatly averse to such frivolous amusements, and indeed to everything that was cheerful or refining. Miss Pragmore was very Low Church, and for that, or some other reason, considered herself called upon to protest as it were against the beneficence of Providence, which has given us so much that is bright, beautiful, and exhilarating, to compensate us for our sorrows and disappointments. Whatever milk of human kindness had flowed in the bosom of Miss Pragmore, some acetous influence had converted into the sourest butter-milk.

Matters were somewhat improved when Percy Clendon came to be articled pupil to Mr. Dalton and reside in the house, as Jessie, having an ally, frequently broke out into petty rebellion, and would laugh at some of Percy's sayings, and answer him with saucy rejoinders.

Miss Pragmore frowned at what she called these indecorous proceedings, but Mr. Dalton was gratified

to see his Jessie smile, and to listen to her laughter and mirthful sallies.

Jessie had long lost her ill opinion of Percy, who had been received by her father at the earnest solicitation of Mr. Deering, as Mr. Dalton had formed an unfavourable estimate of the lad's qualifications for the making of a good lawyer.

"I am afraid," Mr. Dalton said, "that our young friend wants stability, and that plodding perseverance which is needful to success in our profession, and which has made so many dull men good lawyers."

"Oh, he'll grow out of all that," replied Deering. "You can't put old heads on young shoulders; and I like the boy, and would do him any kindness I could, none greater than getting you for a master."

Mr. Dalton felt the compliment, and as Deering had been for years a good client, and a better friend, Percy Clendon was appointed to a stool in Bedford Row.

Mr. Dalton's offices were similar to most other places devoted to the retailing of law. Two or three ink-stained desks, a table covered with dingy briefs and other papers, the usual number of japanned boxes properly labelled — some like family tombs, containing the most valuable part of the Fitzcarraways; others like beacons to warn embryo suitors of the costliness of suits made in the Court of Chancery; and some whose sepulchral inscriptions — "John Jones, deceased," "Exors. of David Brown" — seemed to be silent remonstrants against the indulgence of angry passions, or greed and chicanery,

by thus proclaiming, "In the midst of life we are in death."

Mr. Dalton's two clerks were singularly opposite to each other in appearance and character. Mr. Perry — or Perrywinkle as he was called by his fellows at the Writ Office — was rather an oddity. He was about two-and-twenty, with lank, whity-brown hair, always neatly combed and flavoured with bergamot oil. He wore very short straps, which kept his well-worn trowsers in a state of extreme tension, until it was wonderful to behold, that any inflexion of the body did not produce a *crevasse*, or pull off a button. Mr. Perry was remarkable for the management of his linen. On Monday he displayed a front, wristbands, and collar. On Tuesday the front was partially concealed by the coat being closely buttoned, whilst the wristbands had nearly retired from view, and the collar was much reduced in altitude. On Wednesday Mr. Perry might have been taken for a desponding widower, he was so very black, had not the absence of a band from his hat proclaimed him not a mourner. On the contrary, by some process known only to himself, Mr. Perry contrived to make his hat positively glisten, so smooth and gummy was it.

Mr. Perry was very subdued in his manner, and drudged away at his desk with patience and industry, or trudged about in all weathers as he was required for any number of hours, except on Wednesdays and Saturdays. On those days he not unfrequently forewent the hour allowed for dinner, in order that he might leave the office at five o'clock.

Mr. Daw, the head clerk, never could get him to account for this peculiarity of conduct, although he had more than once offered him as much as a shilling to remain for an extra hour or two. Mr. Perry was always positive and silent as to his objection to continue work on Wednesdays and Saturdays, even when upon one occasion his situation was imperilled by his refusal.

Mr. Isaac Daw was a bright, clever fellow, some three years the senior of Mr. Perry. He was a good dresser, confident and easy in his manner, and would have been good-looking but for two piggy grey eyes which gave him a cunning expression by no means agreeable. He was uncommunicative as to his family connexions, and it had been rumoured that his father had been at one time of his life a sheriff's officer in one of the midland counties. This might have been the case, as Mr. Daw was very ready with suggestions for making captions of difficult customers, and was evidently skilled in the knowledge of what may be called the dodges of the law. True, he might have acquired those attainments in the office where he had served his articles — his master having been a sharp-practice attorney, who ultimately was struck off the rolls. Mr. Dalton always discouraged any recourse to such disreputable proceedings, but Mr. Daw now and then — from force of habit, no doubt — had a little private practice on his own account.

When Mr. Daw's articles were out, and he was at liberty to act for himself, he determined to make money, believing that with that talisman all other objects in life were easily attainable. His salary

was not large, but he contrived to save something, after providing a good external appearance, which he considered part of his stock in trade, or to speak more respectfully, as a necessary of his profession.

Bad lawyers we know are as plentiful as blackberries, at least in story-books; but Mr. Daw is not put forward as a fair sample of a profession, which, as the world goes, we believe to number amongst its members some of the most honourable of men.

Mr. Daw had determined to *make money*, and his schemes for that purpose were many and ingenious. He now and then dined with Mr. Dalton's family, and on such occasions Miss Jessie was not overlooked as one of the probabilities that might conduce to the attainment of his aspirations. Mr. Daw, therefore, put forth all his powers of pleasing, and as Jessie was glad of any change from the solemn proprieties of Miss Pragmore, she generally displayed so much satisfaction, that Mr. Daw might be pardoned for entertaining hopes that the day might come, and by her means, when "Dalton and Daw" would be read on the office door-posts. The advent of Mr. Percy Clendon was, therefore, particularly disagreeable to Mr. Daw, as the pupil had many more opportunities of intercourse with Jessie; and a less clever fellow than the head clerk would either have been disheartened, or been led into open hostilities with his rival.

Not so Mr. Daw. He soon perceived the defect of Percy's character, and became his kind, good friend, who never made work irksome to him, and

again and again relieved him of his professional tasks, to the mortification of Mr. Dalton. Mr. Daw knew his employer well enough to be certain that no client's interests would be entrusted to such a careless assistant as Percy, and that "Dalton and Clendon" would never be united together.

Poor Percy was often "carpeted," and as often he promised amendment. Then for a week or two he kept his promise, only to relapse into the hands of Mr. Daw.

The long vacation was on, and Mr. Dalton and Jessie had gone down to Hartsden on a visit; Percy, with Mr. Daw's concurrence, was taking his pleasure at Margate, and for the first time in his life looking on the sea, and wondering, perhaps, as many have done before, and will again, whether the great ships sinking beyond the horizon would find their far-off havens, and escaping storms and wrecks, return again to dear Old England. Wondering, also, whether he should be brave enough, should occasion demand it, to venture in so frail a thing as a ship upon that treacherous sea — now calm as an infant's sleep, now raging like a frenzied giant — with only the day and night for change, never resting until thousand after thousand of miles had been traversed, and another than his native land received him: — or, perhaps Percy was content to stroll about in buff slippers, pay his shilling for a dip, dress, and display his comely person on Jervis's jetty.

One morning during this long vacation, an elderly lady, accompanied by a maid-servant, entered the

office, and with rather a tremulous voice, desired to see Mr. Dalton.

"Mr. Dalton is out of town, ma'am," said Mr. Daw; "but I am his managing clerk. Will you step into Mr. Dalton's office?"

"Well, sir; no, thank you," replied the lady. "I think, if you please, I would rather see a more elderly gentleman."

"Sorry to hear that, ma'am," said Mr. Daw, blandly, "because it implies that you doubt my experience."

"Oh dear no, sir; pray don't think that," said the lady, nervously rolling her pocket handkerchief into a ball. "But it's a delicate matter, sir, and —"

"Your confidence would not be misplaced," said Daw, more blandly even than before. "I have had cases of extreme delicacy confided to me, family and conjugal."

"Oh, it aint that, sir. I'm a spinster, although I call myself Mrs. Hobbs, sir."

Daw saw that the client was yielding, and therefore he said, with the most assuring smile, "Perhaps you had better step into this room," opening the door of Mr. Dalton's private office; and Mrs. Hobbs, after a moment's hesitation, and a parting glance at her maid, did as she was requested.

Mr. Daw handed Mrs. Hobbs a large morocco chair, as though anxious to make her business as easy to her as possible; and having seated himself at a writing table, folded his hands and smiled sweetly

at the client, who, thus encouraged and comforted, proceeded to say:

"I told you, sir, my name is Hobbs — Susan Hobbs. Please don't write anything down at present." (Mr. Daw had taken up a pen from habit.) "I've been housekeeper for four-and-twenty year to the Honourable Missus Fortescue, who is dead a matter of two year and a month. I never had but one service afore, sir, and that was with the Honourable Missus Fortescue's mama — then as upper housemaid."

Mrs. Hobbs paused, and Mr. Daw smiled, knowing from long experience that such clients as Mrs. Hobbs had better not be interrupted. "My place — I'm free to own it — was a good place, sir, as it had perquisites, and we kept a deal of company, and —" Mrs. Hobbs paused again, but again encouraged by Mr. Daw went on, "and I saved a matter —"

"Yes, my dear madam," said Mr. Daw, perceiving that Mrs. Hobbs thought she was rather committing herself in naming the amount of her "savings."

"Well, sir, about two thousand and sixty pounds; which was well I did, sir, seeing that the Honourable Missus Fortescue died, and left me nothing but a beggarly annuity of fifty pound a year, and a cottage, as long as I live, on Hampstead Heath; after four-and-twenty year of faithful service, sir."

"Mean, undoubtedly mean," said Daw, whatever his real opinion might have been of legacy and service.

"Well, sir, now comes the delicate part of the matter. I'm six — I'm arrived at that time of life" (Mrs. Hobbs began to weep copiously) "when — according to what I have read upon tombstones — life is short, and something keeps on whispering to me as it was, 'Susan Hobbs, make your will!'"

"Quite right, my dear ma'am," observed Daw, again taking his pen.

"Don't write yet, please, sir," said Mrs. Hobbs, earnestly. "I want to ask you a solemn question; and though you are a younger man than I had hoped to have seen, I dare say you've seen enough of wills to answer me."

"I have, ma'am; I have seen and executed a vast number of wills. In fact, will making is the principal business of this office," said Daw, gravely.

"Well, sir, then this is it. Do you — as a professional gentleman — do you, sir, think there is any danger in making a will?"

"Danger?"

"I mean, sir, do people die sooner for making a will? I've heard so —"

"Nonsense! Nonsense, my dear ma'am," replied Daw, laughing pleasantly. "On the contrary, people always live longer; a will made sets your mind at ease — peace of mind adds to length of life. Case of two ladies in this office — twins. One wouldn't make her will, the other would. The non-testamentary party died two years ago; the other party is hale, vigorous, and refused an offer of marriage last week."

"Then, sir, if you please we'll do it," said Mrs. Hobbs, drying her eyes, and producing from her re-

ticule a pocket-book, she took from it the particulars of her "savings," and handed them to Mr. Daw.

"Consols, I see — very satisfactory security, indeed; the best for persons unacquainted with business," said Mr. Daw. "And now, ma'am, for your instructions."

"Well, sir, they're not a many," replied Mrs. Hobbs. "You see, sir, I've not got but a few relations that I know on, sir — I was an orphan child, and the only person as I ever knew as a relation was a cousin Jemima, who was married to a Mr. Oldywinkle —"

"Oldywinkle?" asked Daw; "that's a singular name."

"I aint quite sure that that is the name, but it's very like; indeed, I'm almost certain it was Oldywinkle, but she's dead I fancy —"

"Then it is useless making her a legatee," observed Mr. Daw.

"So I supposed," said Mrs. Hobbs, smiling at her own sagacity; "but she'd two children, a boy and a girl."

"And their names?"

"Well, I did once hear them, but I don't remember what they was called. They lived at Chuckley, and if they're a living, I should like to leave them my savings."

"Very well, ma'am; we must make a run down to Chuckley and inquire, in the meantime we can leave blanks. Any other legacies?"

"Yes, sir, if you please," said Mrs. Hobbs, re-

ferring to a piece of paper. "There is a woman as does my charing, and has a large family."

"Of course," said Daw.

"I wish to leave her a gown which is in the mahogany drawers, and my two brown fronts, with side curls to match, also ten pound."

Mr. Daw said "Very good. What's her name?" and smiled as he wrote.

"Mrs. Macarthy. Then there's my maid, sir; I have promised her a legacy if she'll leave off giving me warning every other month, so put her down for ten pound, and the tea-caddy, and the rest of the clothes, upper and under. Her name's Rosa, I believe, but I call her 'Mary.'"

"Any other person?" asked Daw.

"Not no one, sir," answered Mrs. Hobbs, wiping her face and heaving a great sigh, as though she had relieved her bosom of some perilous stuff which had oppressed her.

Mr. Daw, having taken down the new client's name and address, conducted her to her maid, in the outer office, and then both of them to the door. When he returned to his own room he amused himself by making a rough draft of the last will and testament of Susan Hobbs, spinster, leaving the necessary blanks to be filled up hereafter.

Mr. Daw thought much of his client that afternoon, and during his simple dinner at the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street, and at intervals during the after conversation with other legal gentlemen who at one time were accustomed to assemble on Saturday evenings in the saw-dust covered coffee room of that

respectable house of entertainment. As he walked homewards to his lodgings in Exeter Street, he thought of Mrs. Hobbs until he determined, though the next day was Sunday, that he would go on the following morning to Chuckley, and learn what he could of the family of Oldywinkles.

The early morning train reached the nearest station to Chuckley about half-past ten, and being only distant about a mile, Mr. Daw strolled leisurely along the parish road, musing as he went. As he drew near the village the church bells were calling the people to their devotions; and ceasing just as he came in sight of the church, Mr. Daw felt a momentary inclination to take part with the villagers in the morning service. On second thoughts he concluded, that, as the day was hot, he might fall asleep and disturb the congregation; so he determined to confine himself to an inspection of the church-yard, and listen to the psalmody softened by the intervening walls and windows of the church. Village choirs always sing in earnest, and Mr. Daw could therefore hear the tune, and join in it, *sotto voce*; although the sacred words of the singers were unfamiliar to him. Humming the notes, therefore, with as much indifference as he would have done those of an opera air, Mr. Daw sauntered about among the graves, reading the names of the dead, but rarely perusing the rude epitaphs with which affection had endeavoured to express its admiration or sorrow.

At last he paused before a white railed and carefully kept grave. The inscription had great interest for him, as it recorded the names and dates of death

of Peter Alderwinkle, and also Jemima his wife. Mrs. Hobbs' memory, Mr. Daw concluded, had been, in part, correct. Having copied down correctly the inscription on the rail — and his devotional inclination having been satisfied, — Mr. Daw walked into the village, and selecting a neat-looking inn for his resting-place, made bold to knock, and found a welcome.

The hostess was in charge (taking her turn at church in the afternoon), and Mr. Daw, with his easy, confident manner, soon made himself sufficiently at home to institute certain inquiries about the Alderwinkles.

"Know 'em, sir?" asked the hostess — "I should think I did, seeing as I was borned here. Old Peter was a good fellow enough, but his wife was not much to brag on. Perhaps you be related to 'em, though?"

"Not I," replied Daw, smiling. "I only wanted to know whether their son and daughter still lived here."

"I'm glad to say they doesn't," replied the landlady. "Mrs. Alderwinkle was a bad mother, sir, and let her daughter Carryline, who was a fine strapping girl surely, get into mischief afore she knew what was right; and I did hear she was some fine gentleman's miss up in London."

"Did you hear the gentleman's name?" asked Daw, carelessly.

"I did hear it, but I've forgot it. The only good I knows of her is, that folk do say that she sends our sexton ten shillings a year to keep the

old people's grave in order. You'll like a bit of bacon with your chicken?"

"Yes, if you please," replied Daw. — "And the brother?"

"What, Dick Alderwinkle? Well, nobody knows much of him, or how he lives," answered the hostess. "He's a dog-fancier, I heard my master say, whatever that is. He's up in London, too. He comed here about two year ago, dressed well enough; but as every one gave him the cold shoulder he went off in a huff, cussing and swearing, I was told."

Mr. Daw, having suggested the addition of a tart to his forthcoming dinner, went into the garden, and seating himself in an arbour, wrote down all that the landlady had told him.

The simple dinner was admirably served, and as Mr. Daw was on business of the office, he superadded a pint of sherry, which was not quite so good as the dinner.

When the church bells had rung and ceased for the afternoon service, Mr. Daw took a walk in the fields, and, finding a shady resting-place, he sat down. The sweet odour of the second hay seemed like incense, and the chirping birds, flitting from bough to bough, sang no imperfect hymn to the Great Giver of their happiness. Away, as far as the eye could see, was lovely landscape, and an unclouded heaven; but Mr. Daw looked and saw not, heard the blithe birds, and smelled the fragrant hay, and was insensible to either influence. Mrs. Hobbs was in his thoughts, — Mrs. Hobbs, and her dishonoured relatives, and the mighty sum of two thou-

sand pounds! Was he planning how he could effect that common fraud, a forged will? Not he. He was not such a fool as that. Had he been, he would have found no place in our story. That he was scheming something for his advantage was evident; and so clear to him appeared to be his device that he almost sprung to his feet when he had determined on its adoption, exclaiming,

"That's it! That's it, by Jove!"

Mr. Daw walked quietly back to his inn, and, having partaken of tea, paid his bill, and returned to London.

As Mr. Daw had devoted his day of rest to his employer's business he contented himself the next day with merely calling at Bedford Row; and having examined such letters as pertained to the office, and re-enclosed those requiring Mr. Dalton's attention, Mr. Daw gave himself a holiday, and went in pursuit of his old master.

We have no desire to introduce to our readers the disreputable man who had forfeited, by chicanery and fraud, his position in an honourable profession; but Mr. Daw had a difficult, if not a dangerous game to play, and he had faith in the legal acumen of the man whose counsel he sought.

"There's no doubt as to the legality of the transaction. It would hold water in any court, or I'd lose my head. But you'd better find out the brother and sister, and see if they're likely to be inquisitive. Can I have the job?"

"I'm afraid not. You know how much old Dalton stands on professional propriety," replied

Daw. "No, I must work this matter myself, and before he comes back, or he'll be throwing the case up."

"You ought to be well paid by your client, Isaac; and I suppose I may look for half a sovereign?" asked the scamp.

"Certainly — there's a sovereign, old boy. I am quite justified in charging 'Expenses' with that, under circumstances."

"Oh, quite. I should never have objected to such a charge when I was in practice."

So the sovereign changed owners.

It was clear that Mr. Daw had not trusted his old teacher with all his case, or, it is equally certain, he would have had to pay for the advice he had received in more ways than one, as the degraded lawyer continued to sink lower and lower in the social quagmire into which a dishonest Will-o'-the-wisp had decoyed him.

Whilst Mr. Daw is completing one of his plans for making money, let us turn over a page and find ourselves at Hartsden.

CHAPTER VII.

DURING the last three years Hartsden and its indwellers had suffered a material change. The garden had been greatly improved, and easy resting places constructed, as Mildred, though capable of moving about without assistance, was readily fatigued, and there was no requirement of hers disregarded by her father. A low pony carriage had been constructed, especially adapted to her comfort, though she rarely felt strong enough to drive the docile pony assigned to her sole use. Within doors various were the appliances to afford the poor deformed girl change of posture and relief from the sense of weariness which oppressed her, and no device was omitted to amuse her and lighten the many weary hours of the day.

Jessie Dalton was sincerely attached to Mildred, and made two or three long visits every year, for which Mr. Deering felt a deep and lasting gratitude.

Mrs. Deering's position in her own house would have been a painful one but for her early training, as the strong love of Deering for his child, increased a hundredfold by her suffering, entirely absorbed all tender consideration for his wife; and as the union had been one of convenience, there were none of the old memories of an early love to plead against his

selfishness. Mrs. Deering had a mother's natural affection for her child, and no doubt Mildred's affliction would make her dearer to her had she not been daily compelled to feel that for her daughter's sake her claims to be regarded were set aside, and that she had come to occupy no place in her husband's heart, and at times to doubt if she retained even his respect. Had she been differently nurtured, it is possible that Mrs. Deering would have asserted her right to be regarded as a wife and mother, but the force of early habit prevailed, and she became submissive, almost beyond the submission of a servant.

Mildred was very young, and had from her birth been spoiled and petted by her father. Unconsciously, she came to lose in part her filial respect for her mother, although she would have protested against any diminution of her love for her, had she been questioned. Mrs. Deering was not insensible to this almost natural consequence of her treatment by her husband, but she had not the courage to remonstrate, and bore all patiently — silently. Mr. Deering was not conscious of the wrong he was doing. To him Mildred, his bright, beautiful child, had been the embodiment of all his hopes for a happy future. His fancy had run before, and seen her the graceful woman — the happy wife of some good man, to whom and to whose children the lands of Hartsden would descend and keep green for time to come the memories of the Old Place. The accident of a day had nearly destroyed all these pleasant dreams, and might do so entirely unless Mildred could be restored to health and strength

(never to her lithe form and rosy beauty), and both came so slowly that he could scarce perceive them coming. Mildred was always on his mind, and being so associated with fears and regrets, the strong man became weakened day by day, until at last he was missed from the hunting field and the market table, and all other places where he had been the foremost to promote and to share the social enjoyments of his neighbours.

Deering after a while became conscious that these changes pointed but to one ending, and that it was time for him to put his house in order. Mr. Dalton and he had, therefore, many earnest conversations together, and during one of them Mr. Deering made rather a strange revelation to his friend.

"I have thought several times of late that God's teaching is not to be disregarded with impunity, and that I should have been a happier man had I always thought so."

"I don't clearly understand you," replied Dalton.

"I ought to have forgiven my sister Louisa her trespass against me," said Deering, "and not have married to mortify and disappoint her. I ought not to have married as I did."

"I hardly see that," replied Dalton. "Mrs. Deering has always seemed to have ——"

"O yes, I was not thinking of her exactly," said Dalton, "I was thinking of Mildred."

"When are you not thinking of Mildred?" asked Dalton, kindly.

"Never, I believe, and no wonder, seeing the sad condition ——" Deering could not go on.

"True, my good friend," said Dalton, laying his hand on Deering's arm, "she is in truth a great sufferer, but I can see a vast improvement in her since I was here in the spring. She certainly gains strength, and remember, she might have been killed, and ——"

"I sometimes wish she had been," said Deering, rising and walking about the room. "Often, I may say, though I think I should have died too. Poor child! Poor child!"

"You are forgetting God's teaching now, I fear," said Dalton. "Mildred is indeed afflicted, but life has still its charms for her, and all that affection can do to mitigate her condition is done, old friend."

"Yes, I know that, but when I am gone — and as I have told you, I have had my warnings — what will then come to her?"

"Her mother ——"

"No!" replied Deering, sharply. "Her mother can never be to her what I have been. I see it every day. See it, and think I am in part to blame that Milly has no comfort in her mother — Shall I say it? Has no true love for her."

"That is very sad, if your conjectures are true," replied Dalton.

"Mrs. Deering can never forget what she has been, and Milly's quick enough to see her mother's deficiencies. I don't think she knows that her mother was — was a governess."

"No dishonour in that, Deering. Many of our noblest women have been teachers."

"But *we* know the truth, Dalton, and Mrs. Deering is still what she was. No, Milly has no counsellor, no guide in her mother," replied Deering, resuming his seat.

"Well, well, you are anticipating evil, Deering, and there's no good comes of that. You may live — nay, have a right to hope that you may live long enough to see Milly's character formed, and her strength restored."

"Pray God it may be so!" answered Deering, and then the two friends were silent for a few minutes.

"How about young Clendon?" asked Deering, abruptly. "You've found him a good fellow?"

"O yes," replied Dalton. "He is a kind, gentlemanly youth, and a pleasant addition to my family, but I fear, as I said long ago, that he'll never make a good lawyer. He is not plodding."

"Well, he's young, and time may cure him of his idleness," said Deering, "the more especially if —"

"Why do you pause?" asked Dalton.

"If — if it were possible to hold out to him some expectation that he might have a chance of joining you."

Dalton shook his head.

"Why not?" continued Deering. "The lad has some money, and I would help him with more. Why not?"

"More than money would be wanted," replied

Dalton. "More than all Percy Clendon's good qualities, before I could think of sharing with him the responsibilities of the interests entrusted to my care, and I am sure he will never make a good lawyer."

"You can't be sure of that or anything else in this world," said Deering, sharply. "At least, I hope you will not dismiss the probability of such a contingency at once, and I'll tell you why."

Dalton merely bowed to express that he was listening.

"From a hundred little circumstances which perhaps no one but me would have noticed, I am all but certain that Milly — though Clendon was partly the cause of her accident — that she is strongly attached to him. You know they correspond, and if by chance his letter is delayed, she becomes restless and peevish, and when she was first bed-ridden, he never missed an hour that he could get but he spent it with her, and she remembers that, and all he used to read to her and talk about; and I am certain in my own mind that she loves Percy, though such a word has never escaped her lips, and perhaps she does not know it herself." Deering continued to ramble on in this manner for some time, until Dalton asked him what course he proposed to take, supposing his conjectures to be true?

"That's what I want you to advise, Mr. Lawyer," answered Deering. "I have thought if I could, by the proposal I suggested just now, get any claim on Clendon's gratitude, and if Milly should recover health and strength, that he might

— I hardly like to say it — he might be led to marry her.”

Mr. Dalton smiled gravely as he said: “I never had such a case as this in my office, old friend, and I should not know how to commence proceedings. I should fear, however, that any attempt to make a bargain on such a subject with Percy Clendon would not be very successful.”

“Then he never speaks of Milly?” asked Deering, sadly.

“Oh, indeed, but he does,” answered Dalton. “We always hear her letters read, and know what pleasure he receives when he gets them, and how gratified he is whenever she tells him of any improvement in her health, and all that! I am sure he is very fond of Milly, and I think you had better trust to the chapter of accidents to bring about what you wish.”

“Well, perhaps you are right,” said Deering; “but promise me this, that now you know what is in my mind, if you should hear a word that could be used to — well — to bring about a match, you’ll put all your d— professional etiquette in your pocket, and serve me.”

Dalton laughed as he replied: “I will do anything I can, old friend, but I never knew much good come of match making.”

Whether there was any foundation for Mr. Deering’s conjecture as to the state of his daughter’s feeling towards Percy Clendon, may or may not be inferred from two little incidents which occurred during certain conversations between Mildred and

her friend Jessie. Trifles sometimes reveal great secrets. Jessie had been giving Mildred an account of one of her visits to the theatre, when, as was usually the case, Percy had been of the party.

"Papa so seldom goes to the play, that it is quite delightful to see the interest he takes in it. He rarely removes his eyes from the stage, and if Percy and I even whisper together he looks round and reproves us with a frown."

"I think I should do the same," said Milly. "It must be very annoying to have one's attention disturbed by other people talking."

"Oh, we don't dare talk, we only whisper or make motions. Percy and I are quite clever at pantomime, I assure you, and often carry on a clandestine correspondence under the very nose of Miss Pragmore."

"You and Percy seem to be great allies," said Mildred, with the slightest tone of sarcasm in her voice.

"Oh, quite!" replied Jessie. "I often wonder now why I ever disliked him. I don't think I did really."

"Indeed!" said Milly, quietly. A slight tinge came into her usually pale face, and closing her eyes she laid her head quietly on the pillow placed behind her on the sofa. Perhaps she was fatigued with talking. She often was so.

Percy's weekly letter came a day or two afterwards. It was dated from Margate, and was addressed, as usual, to "dear sister Milly." After giving an amusing account of what he had seen and

done, it went on to say: "You will be surprised, perhaps, to hear that I have made a conquest of a lady on the beach. She is greatly sought after by the young fellows down here, but she so decidedly gives me the preference that jealousy is the prevailing epidemic. You tell Jessie that she is not so pretty as she is."

"I'm glad he thinks you pretty, dear," interpolated Milly.

"I hope he is not singular in that respect," replied Jessie, a little — oh! so very little — piqued at the tone of her friend's remark.

"I am sure I think you so," added Milly, and then went on with her letter. "Yesterday morning she presented me with a pair of her own slippers, to walk home in" — ("what a foot she must have!") — "as I had carelessly dropped my own into the water. She has horses and carriages — four-wheelers — and is acquainted with most of the nobility and gentry visiting Margate. Perhaps you will not think her so much of a catch when I tell you she is the old woman who lets out the bathing machines."

There was more of such trifling, and the letter ended with a P. S.

"Please tell Jessie with my — hem! — my best regards, that I have for her the prettiest little writing-case that ever was seen out of Margate. I won it at a raffle."

Again the flush had come into Mildred's face, and throughout the day she was very cross at times, and whimsical, giving her mother and the servants

a great deal of trouble, and shedding two little pearly tears when she bade her father good night, and kissed him. Mr. Deering would have had a sleepless night had he seen those tears.

Mrs. Deering usually occupied a bed in a room opening into Mildred's, but since the arrival of Jessie Dalton, she had, with her usual submissiveness, given it up to her daughter's friend. Jessie awoke early the morning after the arrival of Percy's letter, and fancied that she heard a moan as though Mildred were sobbing in her sleep. She arose instantly and went to Mildred's room, and to her sorrow found Mildred awake.

"What is the matter, dearest?" asked Jessie, putting her arms around the neck of Mildred, who returned her embrace, and for a few moments permitted her tears to flow unrestrained.

"Are you in pain, dear?"

"No, love, not more than my usual feeling of discomfort. But it is not that," replied Milly, again giving way to her tears.

"What then? Tell me; you know you may trust me," said Jessie, kneeling down by the side of the bed.

"I am very vexed with myself," replied Mildred.

"Very. When every one about me strives so much to please me, to do me service, I only repay them with peevishness and unkindness."

"No, no; you are very patient, indeed you are; and it is not to be expected that at all times you can master your suffering."

"But I was not suffering yesterday," replied Milly,

"at least not bodily. I was vexed — foolishly vexed at —"

"At what?"

"Some of the expressions in Percy's letter. You will forgive me, will you not, for being so?" said Milly, again embracing Jessie.

"I forgive you? You did not offend me," replied Jessie, somewhat surprised.

"O yes, I did. You answered me as though I had when I repeated what Percy had said."

"About my being pretty? Oh, darling, what folly!"

"Yes. And again when I — when I read that postscript, and ought to have been pleased that he had thought of you — his kind friend, as he always calls you — I was ungenerous enough" — Jessie stopped her mouth with a kiss, and then said,

"Was it for that then that you have been distressing yourself? As though you could ever give me offence — serious offence — dear, dear Milly!" And then she added, half laughing, "I declare I am almost led to believe that you — you love Percy Clendon!"

Milly's pale face grew crimson, as she said earnestly, "Oh, do not believe that, Jessie. I would not have you, or him, or any one believe that, or I should never write to him again, and never let him write to me, and so lose one of my greatest pleasures. Promise me you will never say that again."

"I do promise, dear — I do."

There was a long silence, broken at last by Mildred.

"My father not long ago made some foolish remark about one day seeing me married. I laughed, as he did at the time; but when I was alone, lying here awake, as I often do, I thought of the real meaning to me of my father's words, had he spoken them seriously. What if I were to love any one; if the natural instincts of my nature — to be loved and to love — were to become strong in me; what a miserable future I should have before me!"

"O no —"

"Do not try to deceive me, Jessie. I know it; I feel it. I know that to the end of my life, be it long or short, I shall be a feeble, dependant invalid — I will not say a wretched or repining one, for I will strive, with God's help, to bear the sorrow which has come upon me, as patiently and as cheerfully as my strength will permit; and this resolution has been formed from the readings of Percy Clendon."

"But the doctors say that you will be strong some day."

"God's will be done. I will try and be content. But I have much to contend with. I have been an over-indulged child, and though I know *that*, the seeds of evil have been sown, and will have their harvest. I cannot at all times govern myself. I am hasty, self-willed, impatient of opposition, especially from mama. I love her. I am sure I love her; but not with the devotion of a child for a parent; not as I love my father."

"It is impossible to control our affections," said Jessie, as Mildred paused. "I know I ought to like Miss Pragmore, but I don't — I can't. Papa often

lectures me about my rudeness to her, and only the other day said I was making Percy as rude as myself; but she really had on such a funny cap that no one could have helped laughing at it."

Mildred had unburthened her mind of much which had oppressed her, and so she smiled too when Jessie went on describing Miss Pragmore's funny head-dress.

It was seldom that the two girls mentioned Percy Clendon's name during the remainder of Jessie's visit.

We must now refer to the intestine war which had long agitated the Old Place at Hartsden. Mrs. Coppice had never taken kindly to her new mistress, as we have said. It is a peculiarity of the common sort of our countrymen and countrywomen never to render willing service and obedience to those of their own order who have risen to wealth and position, and this well-known idiosyncrasy has always been advanced whenever the question of promotion in the army by merit has been agitated. The correctness of this opinion is acknowledged by all who have had much experience of the class from which Mrs. Coppice and her mistress came, and it was never more strongly developed than in Mr. Deering's house-keeper.

No rule could have been more gentle or considerate than Mrs. Deering's; but Coppice had "knowed her as a fellow servant," and she would or could only look upon her as an interloper who came into the family by unfair means and "took

her place." As we have said, it required all John Coppice's reasoning and marital insistence to control his helpmate, and keep so good a service as Mr. Deering's was; but the flame of resentment had never been entirely extinguished, and, smouldering for years, broke out at last. When Mrs. Deering's position became what we have described it, owing to her husband's want of proper consideration for his wife, and the respect due from himself to the mother of his child, Mrs. Coppice was quick enough to observe the change, and to display her own sense of wrong accordingly. There was no open rupture; nothing that the mistress could resent or even censure boldly; but as much impertinence and disrespect as could be conveyed by the thousand and one devices common to most ill-conditioned servants, Mrs. Coppice exhibited to her mistress. Mrs. Deering might have been more alive to the conduct of her servant had she not been so constantly reminded by Mr. Deering's conduct towards herself of what her former position in society had been, and that she had once been the companion of Mrs. Coppice in the kitchen, and had answered the same bell.

Mrs. Deering therefore affected not to observe much which would have led to a disturbance, and possibly to some direct humiliation of herself, should Mr. Deering have inclined towards his old domestic.

Mrs. Coppice was to revenge herself in a way she had little dreamed of, and by a mere accident.

The Binneys still made their annual pitch in the Green Lane, though the patriarch of the tribe and his old woman had gone to the place where all

good gipsies go. Lemuel, the boy, had grown into a fine young vagabond, but without the prudence of his father, and Mr. Deering had heard that a couple of grey hens had found their way to the gipsy pot, by Lemuel's agency. He was consequently put under "ban," and forbidden to come near Hartsden, although Lemuel swore by all his gods that he was innocent. During his probation, however, Mrs. Coppice found him skulking about a shrubbery which skirted the end of a meadow adjoining one side of the garden, and from him received a letter, asking for pardon, he said, from Mrs. Deering. Mrs. Coppice had a superstitious fear of the Binneys, and undertook therefore to deliver the letter, and use what influence she could to get it a favourable consideration. As Mrs. Coppice walked home, occasionally looking at the letter as though she would willingly have read its contents through the envelope, she deciphered a word upon it which perplexed her exceedingly, she knew not wherefore.

Mrs. Deering was much surprised that Lemuel should have written to her, she said, but at Coppice's request promised to speak to Mr. Deering in his favour, and her advocacy was sufficient to get the interdiction removed, the more readily as the whole tribe of the Binneys had protested in favour of Lemuel's innocence.

In about five weeks from this occurrence Mrs. Coppice saw with her own eyes, or she wouldn't have believed it, Lemuel meet Mrs. Deering at the bottom of the garden, and deliver into her hand another letter, and which Mrs. Deering not only ac-

cepted readily, but gave the young gipsey money, which he also received unhesitatingly.

The mind of Mrs. Coppice was in a ferment. There was some mystery — some mystery which she could not fathom, but one which Mrs. Deering desired evidently to conceal from her husband, as she destroyed the letter when read, tearing it into minute pieces, and throwing them into the little rivulet flowing at the foot of the garden. Mrs. Coppice saw all this with her own eyes also, or again she would not have believed.

Sleep was a stranger to the Coppice pillows that night, for although John could have deferred further discussion of the mystery until the following morning, Mrs. Coppice would not allow him to slumber, but compelled him to hear the full and true particulars over and over again, always insisting upon a repetition of his opinion of its signification, although it consisted only of this brief sentence: —

“It looks queer, and I can’t make it out.”

Matters continued nearly in this state for some days, when Mrs. Coppice suddenly remembered the strange word which she had read on the former letter, and so explanatory did it appear, that although the Coppices could make nothing of it, they convinced each other that Mr. Deering could, with the aid of the London lawyer.

Mr. Dalton and Mr. Deering were therefore surprised the next day by an application from Mrs. Coppice and her husband for a private audience in the big barn. The request was communicated in

a curiously ungrammatical note, left under Mr. Deering's pot of shaving-water.

The two friends laughed at the singularity of the communication, and at the time named in the note were ready to receive the old housekeeper and Coppice at the place appointed.

The communication made was certainly perplexing, as Mrs. Deering had not told her husband of the receipt of either letter. Nor was the difficulty removed when Mrs. Coppice added: —

"And the first letter, if you please, master, had on it the name of her Royal Majesty Queen Victoria, in large letters."

There had been evidently some concealment, possibly of no wrong, but it was quite clear that Mrs. Deering was withholding her confidence from her husband.

Mr. Dalton was the first to find a clue to the mystery, and which he thought proper to keep to himself.

"Very well, my good friends," he said to the Coppices. "It may be as well to say nothing of this matter to any one else just at present. If, as you surmise, the queen is in correspondence with your mistress, it may not be proper to talk about it."

Mr. and Mrs. Coppice were more puzzled than before. They said nothing, but went their way to the performance of their respective duties.

"What does this mean?" asked Deering, looking ghastly pale.

"I don't know," replied Dalton, "but I think I see a way of getting at it. These letters come once

a month, and from Victoria — that seems pretty clear. Mrs. Deering employs that gipsey rascal to get them for her, and ——”

“It must be so!” exclaimed Dalton. “Let us go to the fellow at once, and make him confess.”

“Not so,” replied Dalton. “We will look when we go in when the next Australian mail is due, and then, I should advise that you keep watch for the gipsey, and take him red-handed — I mean with the letter in his possession.”

“And what then?”

“Well, let us first catch our hare,” replied Dalton, “we can then determine how to cook it.”

The mail was due in a few days, and Coppice was ordered to keep his eye constantly on Lemuel the gipsey, but without exciting suspicion.

The Australian mail arrived, and in due time Lemuel was reported to have been absent from the tent for an entire day, and was then seen lurking about the fields in proximity to the Old Place.

Mr. Deering, accompanied by Dalton only, was on his track instantly, and when he came upon him seized the astonished lad by the collar, and said,

“Give me that letter!”

Lemuel saw at a glance that his mission was known, and without a word delivered up a letter bearing the Victoria postmark, and addressed to Mrs. Deering, but at the neighbouring post town, and not at Hartsden.

Mr. Deering tore open the envelope of the letter, and having read a few lines rapidly, turned to the

signature. His face was red with anger, and for a few moments he seemed unable to speak.

"Here Dalton, take the — don't read it now, I must be the first to do that. Now, look you, you young hound," addressing Lemuel. "How long have you been at this work? How long have you brought these letters?"

"Six months, sir," answered Lemuel.

"Six months. Longer?"

"Well, it may be nine."

"Now hear what I say. You don't mind lying, I know. You swore hard enough when you robbed my hen roost. Now you must lie as I wish you. You will tell Mrs. Deering that no letter has come this mail; and if you give a hint of what has now taken place, I'll hunt you and your tribe out of the county. You know what I say, I do."

"I'll never split, sir, be sure of that," said Lemuel."

The gipsey kept faith, and on the second day after the interview, the Binneys had left their camping ground in the Green Lane.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was a client of Mr. Dalton living in a small freehold cottage, with a plot of ground attached, "situate" at one of the northern suburbs of London, and whom Mr. Daw instantly proceeded to look up. The cottage was a small four-roomed house, neatly whitewashed, and separated from the high road by wooden palings, painted bright green, the *tout ensemble* presenting what might have been described in a playbill as the "Abode of Innocence." An inscription on one corner of the house would possibly have suggested other conclusions — "Canine Cottage" being the name of the residence of Mr. B. Gore. The proprietor was a man of considerable celebrity in his profession, and his name was well known for honest dealing throughout Great Britain and Her Majesty's dependencies.

Mr. Daw entered without the ceremony of knocking, and was heartily welcomed by Mr. Gore, then attired in his home suit, — a faded shooting jacket, — and reading "Bell's Life" in the quiet of his little parlour, the walls of which were ornamented with framed engravings common enough a few years ago, of celebrated dogs — bulls and terriers either in repose or doing the performance of some extraordinary feat of slaughter in a rat pit. Several

silver-mounted dog-collars and leading-straps were also displayed, and in a glass case an experienced taxidermist had preserved, with consummate skill, a small black and tan terrier. Beneath it was a testimonial of the prowess of the departed, written by some classical "fancier" in dog latin, and we regret that the lines live not in our memory.

A bottle of ale had been produced, and its quality tested, when Mr. Gore said in a voice full of sorrow, "Yes, Mr. Daw, that's my celebrated dog, Tiny — he's gone at last, sir — and as I couldn't bear to part with him altogether, I've had him stuffed, so that the kids may know what a dog he was, Mr. Daw. It was only yesterday, as I was rummagin' in my bureau, I found this letter from one of my swells — a Cambridge party as I used to supply with rats and tykes when he was at college. He writ what's under the glass case there in Latin. Here's what he says: 'Bob Gore, you ought to be a proud man, and I've no doubt you are sufficiently corky, to own at one time the handsomest bull in England' — You shall see him presently, Mr. Daw, — 'and the pluckiest black and tan of its weight in or out of England. You ought to be a proud man!' And I was, Mr. Daw, till he died."

"Well, Bob," replied Mr. Daw, "dogs, like men, can't live for ever."

"That's true, and I couldn't have stuffed one of the kids if I'd lost one of them," replied Mr. Gore, evidently deriving some consolation from that reflection, although he might have known a few years afterwards that a mercenary brute exhibited in Lon-

don the body of a wretched creature whom he had made his wife, tricked out in the meretricious dress of a Spanish ballet dancer. But Bob Gore was too honest a fellow ever to have thought such brutality possible.

"Let's step into the yard, and I'll show you Beauty as is spoke of in the letter," said Mr. Gore.

"As they made their way to the back door, Mr. Daw was struck by the peculiar arrangement of a room which was partly divided by some moveable boards, and asked, "What's that for?"

"What's that for?" repeated Mr. G., with a smile, "that's just the question that was asked by a cove with a white choker, who called here a week ago. 'Mr. Gore,' says he, 'I am informed that you has rat killing here very often.'"

"'Me, sir?' says I, looking quite astonished."

"'Yes, and that's against the law, and mustn't be in my district. What's this for?' says he."

"'That, sir, belongs to my missus,' says I. 'She keeps a day-school, and that's where she puts her scholars. So, as I am busy just now, and has given you your answer, perhaps you'll excuse me wishing you good morning.' La! Mr. Daw, you should have seen how shut up he was!"

"Why, I do believe it's a rat-pit, Bob," said Mr. Daw.

"You're a gentleman of great legal experience, sir, and I leaves you to form your own opinion," replied Mr. Gore, opening the door which led into the back yard.

Mr. Daw started back, alarmed, and well he

might be. The opening of that door, and the appearance of Mr. Gore, was the signal for some fifty or sixty dogs of various breeds to spring from their kennels placed about the yard, and tug at the short chains which confined them, as though all were bent on instant strangulation, but finding opportunity, however, to yelp and bark in discordant chorus.

"Don't be frightened, sir, not one of 'em would hurt a hair of your head whilst you're with me," said Mr. Gore, and, holding up his hand, every dog retreated instantly to his kennel, except one new comer, who continued to yelp until a sharp cut from a dog-whip convinced him that strict discipline was observed in Mr. Gore's canine establishment.

Mr. Daw now ventured into the yard, not however, without measuring with his eye the distance between his legs and the nearest kennel.

"Needn't be afraid, sir, I give you my honour," said Mr. Gore, who was accustomed to mix in the best (and worst) society at times. "My kids, not three years old, play with any o' them. Now, sir, I'll show you Beauty. I've refused eighty, ninety, a hundred pound for him. Here, Beauty!"

From the centre kennel came forth a dog whose capacious head had two bright shining eyes, a nose apparently embedded in its skull, and displaying, from the pleasure it derived at recognition by its master, a row of fangs that made Mr. Daw's muscles ache as he looked.

"There's a beauty," said Mr. Gore, falling into an attitude of admiration. "I challenge all England to match him. Isn't he a perfect beauty, Mr. Daw?"

Had Mr. Daw really given his opinion, he would have pronounced Beauty to have been a perfect monster, but, knowing that he could not charge six-and-eightpence for his opinion, he coincided with Mr. Gore.

Mr. Daw had then to listen to a history of Beauty's numerous victories, which cast into the shade all the performances of the other brutes in the yard put together.

"And now, Mr. Daw, what's your business with me?" asked Mr. Gore. "For to tell you the truth, you're about the last man I should have expected to see out here. What can I do for you?"

"Well," replied Mr. Daw, considering how he should proceed. "I have not come on business exactly, it's rather on pleasure."

"Not of seeing me?" asked Mr. Gore, laughing. "You gentlemen of the long robe, as they call you, aint much given to waste time, I fancy. What is it, Mr. Daw?"

"I want you to do me a favour if you can."

Mr. Gore bowed.

"I know you are the most celebrated dog fancier in London —"

"Dog-dealer, please, sir. I can't afford to have fancies with a wife and six kids," interrupted Mr. Gore.

"As you please, but I conclude you know most of the persons in both lines, and I am particularly anxious to find a person of the name of Richard Alderwinkle."

"What — you want to nab him, I suppose?" asked Mr. Gore.

"O no!"

"On your honour, Mr. Daw?"

"On my honour, no; quite the contrary. Possibly something to his advantage," replied Daw.

"It's not that the man's a friend of mine, but as he never did me a turn, good or bad, I shouldn't wish — well, to have him bummed by my means."

"I've no such intention," said Daw. "You do know the man?"

"Yes, just to speak to, nothing more. He's generally called the Commissioner. What may you want with him, if it's a fair question?" said Mr. Gore.

"I merely want to satisfy a client of ours that he is living," replied Daw, coolly. "He is in your way of business, is he not?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir. Dick Alderwinkle lives, like a good many others in our big village, by his wits. He calls hisself a commission agent — lots of 'em about — and in the way of business he buys a tyke now and then. Now he's what I call a fancier. He'll take up with any varmint, breed or no breed, if he can make a shilling or two by him. He's no feeling, — no pride in his tykes, and would as soon sell one with a bad character as a good 'un. Now I stands sponsor for every dog I sell, whether at home or abroad, and I refer you to Indy, Australia, aye, anywhere where a dog's respected."

"Very well," said Daw, considering the witness

had deposed enough on that point. "Now could you manage to let me see him? I don't care about being introduced to him."

"I dare say I could," replied Mr. Gore. "There's a show of 'toys' to-morrow night at Jemmy Shaw's, and he's most sure to be there."

"'Toys!' — what on earth has he to do with 'toys?'" asked Daw.

"'Toys' is small pet dogs, that ladies buy, fit for nothing but to breed fleas and run up the milk score," said Mr. Gore. "There's a run on them just now, and Alderwinkle's likely to want one 'on commission.' I fancy he's got some connections at Brompton that get their money easier than I do, Mr. Daw."

"At Brompton!" And Mr. Daw made a mental note of that locality. "Well, Bob," he added, "I can make this a matter of business. If you will take me with you to-morrow night I can stand a sovereign."

"Business is business with me always, Mr. Daw," answered Mr. Gore, "and I'll call at your office about seven, if that will do, and we'll go on to Jemmy's together. It's rather a queer place, and there'll be some queer customers; but you won't mind that."

"Not I," replied Daw. "I know that a man of the world should see the world before and behind the curtain. Then at seven I shall expect you."

"I'll be there," said Mr. Gore. And so Mr. Daw advanced another step on the road to fortune.

Punctual to his appointment came Mr. Bob Gore,

presenting, however, a marked contrast to his appearance on the day preceding. A dark sporting-cut coat, with a small collar and broad flaps, a light fancy waistcoat, distinguished by numerous pockets, and trowsers fitting tightly to a well-made limb, a rather low-crowned hat, with turned-up brims, stuck jauntily on one side, a large neckerchief of a small shawl pattern wound around his neck, and supporting a pair of rounded shirt collars, distinguished Mr. Bob Gore from the rest of his class.

We are not justified in introducing our readers to the low companionship of a sporting parlour on the night of a dog-show. We have often thought, if Mrs. Frumpton's dear "Wheezy," or Lady Araminta's darling "Bijou" could have spoken, how greatly they would have astonished their gentle owners by some recollections of the vulgar tongue learned during the period of their early training. We have a great regard for dogs proper, but for those little brutes called "pets" we have a hearty dislike. Useless — often worse than useless creatures, — whose price has been the 'prentice fee of some poor boy or girl, and the cost of whose nurture would clothe and feed some neglected child of poverty. There is no more humiliating sight, to our thinking, than to see some stalwart party-coated Jeames strutting in the pride of his servitude, and leading a lap-dog! No wonder then, we think, that Mary Ann, the pretty housemaid, gives her heart to the policeman or the butcher. We have no desire to provoke a revolution in Flunkeydom, but were we of the fraternity who flour their heads and accept a family

uniform, rather than submit to such an indignity as being a lap-dog's leader we would strike and leave the profession!

"There's your man, Mr. Daw," whispered Mr. Gore, as a flashily dressed person about thirty years of age entered the parlour, according a patronising nod to several of the worthies seated at the tables.

Judging from his exterior, the man appeared well-to-do, and was evidently of a cheerful disposition, not oppressed by self-esteem, as he was particularly jocular with everybody, although his humour partook of the general character of the place, and need not be recorded. We shall meet with Richard Alderwinkle again at this place, and again, perhaps, when better influence will make him presentable.

Mr. Daw was sufficiently amused by the novelty of the scene to stay an hour or two in the sporting parlour, and until he had taken a mental portrait of his man, to be certain to recognise him again should he ever wish to do so.

On the afternoon of the following day Mr. Daw again took Mrs. Hobbs into consideration, and exactly at a quarter to five he requested Mr. Perry to make a fair copy of the draught of the will which he had prepared, the blanks now properly filled up.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Perry, as Mr. Daw laid the papers on his subordinate's desk, "this will take a full hour to copy."

"I presume so."

"And it is now a quarter to five, and this is Wednesday," said Mr. Perry, smiling.

"Wednesday or not," replied Mr. Daw, "you must copy it, as the testatrix will be here by appointment at ten to-morrow morning."

"I really cannot stay to do it this evening," said Mr. Perry, firmly. "I really cannot; I have a most particular engagement, and you know I never can stay after five on —"

"Really, Mr. Perry, this conduct of yours is highly improper, and, if persisted in, I shall certainly request Mr. Dalton to give you your mittimus. Pray don't make that necessary."

Mr. Perry was perfectly composed as he replied, "I should regret a separation, very much regret it; but I cannot remain after five this evening. I only took half an hour to my dinner, and am entitled to lock up now, Mr. Daw; but I will promise you this, if I may take the draught home with me, I will copy it before I sleep, and bring it with me in the morning."

"Oh, very well," replied Daw, "that will do, though Mr. Dalton does not approve of papers leaving the office."

Neither would Mr. Daw have done so had he suspected what was to have come of this departure from the general rule.

We have endeavoured to convey to our readers the appearance of Mr. Perry, when occupying his official stool at Bedford Row, and we will now try to present him when away from it, and so explain the mystery of his persistence in departing at the hour for which he had contracted to serve Mr. Dalton for one pound five shillings a week.

In a small street running parallel with Gray's-Inn Road, there was a small door of somewhat dingy aspect, round which, about six o'clock, were assembled a number of young men of rather respectable exterior, and who, on the arrival of Mr. Perry, followed him into the passage, and emerged again upon a small stage whereon they proposed to exhibit Shakespeare's favourite play of Richard III. as altered by Mr. Colley Cibber. The proprietor of this little theatre was well known in the legal world, as he held at one time a post about the Court of Chancery, and it was therefore consonant with the respectability of his character that the performance and performers should be equally unexceptionable.

Mr. Perry — or Perryonet, as he delighted to be called — was the manager and secretary of the Pentonville Thespian Club, and when "his foot was on his native heather" — we must be excused the simile, as well as a little fine writing — no one would have recognised Mr. Perry, of Bedford Row, but for his straps and his gummy hat! He issued orders with the air of a generalissimo, he received communications with the impressive condescension of a Secretary of State, he censured delinquencies with the solemnity of a judge, and was altogether an essentially different creature to the drudge of Mr. Dalton's office, as though he were some enchanted being, who was restored to his proper condition, like the princes we read of in story books — Drudge Perry, afterwards Prince Perryonet.

On the evening in question, Mr. Perryonet having transacted such trifling business as was necessary,

proceeded to dress. The transmogrification effected by that process was marvellous. The lank sandy hair had given place to a black wig of numerous ringlets, burnt cork had simulated a pair of ferocious eyebrows, moustache, and tip, the straps had yielded to white tights and capacious boots, the faded suit of sables to scarlet serge and copper lace, the gummy hat had been supplanted by a velvet bonnet adorned with ostrich feathers, and the shabby gingham umbrella by a gilt-handled sword, carried resting upon the left arm, and forming also a resting-place for the right hand of the crook-backed tyrant. Thus attired, Mr. Perryonet took a last survey of the stage before the orchestral quartette had finished their labours, when the curtain would have to rise. There was grace in every *pose* of Mr. Perryonet! There was genius in the jingling of his spurs as he strode to the little green room where he received the congratulations of "the company" on his excellent "make up."

The play progressed. Mr. Perryonet delivered his autobiography as it stands, Sc. II, Act I., and would have made an effective *exit*, had not the rowels of his spurs become locked with each other, and given his retirement from the scene a somewhat acrobatic appearance. It was evident, however, judging by the shouts of "Bravo, Perryonet" emanating from the front of the house, that our friend was a star of considerable magnitude, although the rival tragedians of the club declared that his only qualifications for Richard were his buck-shins (as had the elder Kean) and a tendency to a cold in the head.

But his detractors were deprived of even those ungenerous suggestions when Mr. Perryonet appeared between the play and the farce as the Grecian Statue, and was again enthusiastically received. His buckshins could not have assisted a statuesque embodiment of the Apollo Belvi, nor a cold in the head conduced to the preservation of immoveable features necessary to the representation of a face of marble. No! Mr. Perryonet was universally popular, and envied accordingly. What could Mr. Daw have offered as compensation for those hours of delicious triumph? Was one pound five an equivalent for the abdication of a sceptre — though made of tinfoil and dutch metal?

Mr. Perryonet thought that money was dross in comparison at that time, and many young enthusiasts will doubtless agree with him. Life is made up largely of dreams; let us not disturb a pleasant one by any grave moralising. The dreamers will wake soon enough without the application of our admonitory cold water.

It was past twelve o'clock, but tired as Mr. Perry was with the exertions of the evening, he resolutely sat down to redeem his promise to Mr. Daw. He had not proceeded far beyond the preamble of the will when "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," overcame the scribe, and the pen fell from his fingers. He continued to sleep until it was nearly daylight, when he was awakened by the noise of his candle expiring in its socket, and fizzing and sputtering in the agonies of dissolution. Mr. Perry did not attempt to contend with fate, but setting his little

alarum at seven, undressed and sought further sleep on his turn-up bedstead.

The alarum and the neighbouring church clock struck seven together, and Mr. Perry put on his straps and their accessories, after performing his ablutions in a rather limited washing basin and a larger red pan, which had at one time served as a receptacle for bread before Mr. Perry became its proprietor. His lank hair, greatly disordered by the wigs of the preceding night — was soon rendered tractable by an oleaginous compound prepared by Mr. Perry from olive oil and essence of bergamot. The rest of his toilet was left incomplete, and would so remain until after the serving of his breakfast, which was included with other little extras, in his contract of twelve shillings a week with his landlady. Mr. Perry then set to work at the will, and had barely completed his task — taking his matutinal meal as he wrote — in time to reach Bedford Row by the regular office hour, which he would not have exceeded, not even if he had omitted the application of the sponge to his gummy hat. Mr. Daw was not so punctual, and Mr. Perry was seated at his desk preparing his pens for the coming day's work, when his superior arrived.

"Here is the copy, Mr. Daw, according to promise," said Mr. Perry, smiling.

"All right!" replied Mr. Daw. "Where's the original draught?"

"Bless me!" exclaimed Perry. "I have left it at home. Shall I run back for it?"

"Well — no, never mind, though you see that

the governor is quite right in not allowing papers to go out of the office. I thought of some alterations after you were gone, and have had a copy made by a stationer, — so the old lady can have her choice."

Mr. Perry thought nothing of this at the time, but went to his work forgetting, like many other great men in adversity, the height from which he had tumbled so lately.

At ten minutes to ten Mrs. Hobbs, still under the protection of her maid, was seen hovering near Mr. Dalton's office, continually referring to her watch as though she were fearful of putting in an appearance, Daw said, a moment too early or a moment too late. With the last stroke of a neighbouring church clock, Mrs. Hobbs rang the office bell, and being admitted, smiled and curtsied at Mr. Perry, who for a moment forgetting time and place, returned her one of his best stage bows, and so uncommonly unlike the bow of private life. Mr. Daw, however, came to the rescue, and having shaken Mrs. Hobbs most warmly by the hand, led her, "nothing loth," to her doom in the private office of his absent principal.

After a few preliminary observations, chiefly complimentary to Mrs. Hobbs, Mr. Daw began to read in a clear but rather sepulchral voice the preamble to Mrs. Hobbs's last will and testament, at which the poor lady burst into a flood of tears, as though she were assisting at her own funeral and was weeping by contract for all the rest of the mourners.

Mr. Daw paused, and with a consideration that

Mrs. Hobbs felt sincerely, opened a small corner cupboard, and having produced two decanters of wine and a glass, merely said, very blandly — "Port or sherry, madam?"

It was early in the morning, but Mrs. Hobbs was an early riser, and she replied almost in a whisper — "Well, if I must, let it be port, if you please, sir."

The generous fluid gave the testatrix heart, but she positively refused a second glass, "at least for the present." Mr. Daw read on.

When he came to the name of Richard Alderwinkle he stopped. "I found, madam, on personally searching the — the churchyard at Chuckley — that the name of your deceased relative was Alder — and not Oldywinkle."

"Well, I knowed I was near it, sir," replied Mrs. Hobbs; "and did you hear if the young people are alive?"

Mr. Daw looked grave, and did not reply for a moment or two. "Ye-s, madam, the young people, as you call them, are alive." Mr. Daw paused again.

"Why do you stop, sir?" asked Mrs. Hobbs, rather surprised.

"Because I am unwilling to give you pain, but — yes — it is right — it is my duty to tell you all I learned at Chuckley, as it will form an item in the costs."

"What in good gracious do you mean, sir?" asked Mrs. Hobbs, alarmed now.

"It is certainly proper that you should know the

character of those to whom you are about to be so generous," said Daw, gravely. "Your second cousin, Richard Alderwinkle, is, I am sorry to say, unworthy of the relationship. He is a man of low pursuits, a dog-fighter, a person who lives by his wits."

Now if Mrs. Hobbs had what she called a horror of any one, it was of a person who lived by his wits; and she included a great number of people and professions under that description.

"Then, sir," she exclaimed, "he doesn't touch a shilling of my honest savings, so scratch him out at once, and give his share to his sister;" but seeing that Mr. Daw shrugged his shoulders at this proposition, she added, "Isn't she all right?"

Mr. Daw, with considerable ability, translated the landlady at Chuckley's brief communication into such a glowing description of depravity on the part of Miss Alderwinkle, that Mrs. Hobbs positively blushed for her abandoned relative, and said so.

"O, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Hobbs, after a moment's thought, "what a fortunate discovery; but for your kindness in going to Chuckley, and rummaging the churchyard, I should have been giving my savings as the wages of sin, and adding to its perquisites! I am shocked! truly shocked."

Mr. Daw thought she would have been, or he had exerted his descriptive powers in vain.

"It's very perplexing," said Mrs. Hobbs, after some reflection, "I ought to make a will."

"It is the duty of every one possessing property," said Mr. Daw, "to make disposition of it before he or she is called to that bourne where legal advice is

unattainable, and testamentary power is not recognised. The omission of this duty only tends to litigation, and putting money into the pockets of the lawyers — at all times objectionable — undesirable.”

“But what am I to do? I’ve no other relations, and no friends,” said Mrs. Hobbs. “What do you think of hospitals, sir?”

“Admirable institutions! Admirable, no doubt,” replied Daw; “but already too rich. Indeed, government is obliged to interfere and regulate their vast incomes.”

“Government!” said Mrs. Hobbs, “I hate having anything to do with government.”

“A pardonable prejudice, or conviction, I should rather say. Shall we say hospitals?” asked Daw.

“No, sir, no, — I think not.”

“Perhaps on the whole your relatives — yet stay — there is a form, not exactly a will, by which you could dispose, or rather devise your property, and avoid the probate duty.”

“What’s that, sir? Is it anything like the income tax?”

“Much the same, madam.”

“Drat that income tax!” exclaimed Mrs. Hobbs, warming up. She had had a second glass of port — vintage public house. “O, sir, the trouble I’ve had with that income tax nobody knows but myself. What with their taking it off when they shouldn’t, and putting it on when they shouldn’t, and my having to sign and sign no end of papers, and dance backwards and forwards to the bank, I do de-

clare to you, sir, as true as I sit here, I never worked so hard in my life as I have done for my own, with that outrageous income tax."

"There are thousands who sympathise with you, madam," said Daw, kindly; "and I have been thinking that there is a simple way of avoiding the difficulty I have named, but I hardly like to take so grave a responsibility upon myself, though it is a common practice with my principal, Mr. Dalton."

"Please to explain, sir."

"Here is a form," said Mr. Daw, taking a fairly copied paper from a drawer, "we keep them prepared, you see, — by which you can appoint a sort of trustee — myself for example — who undertakes to save you all trouble at the bank, to pay you your dividends, and — and to carry out any testamentary wishes you may have. Do you understand?"

"I think I do," said Mrs. Hobbs.

"By this arrangement your disreputable relatives might be benefited at your decease, should they have repented of their errors, and become respectable members of society."

"Let us pray, sir, they may do so," said Mrs. Hobbs, fervently.

Mr. Daw tried to say amen, but as he was not good at extempore supplication, he went on: — "and really, seeing how peculiarly you are placed — a lone woman, without friend or relative to assist you — I will waive any personal objection I may have had to incur responsibility, and act as this trustee."

"You are very good, sir, I'm sure, very good, and if you will charge —"

"No, not for such a service as that," interrupted Mr. Daw; "we are all more or less dependent on each other, and — if you will take another glass of wine, and amuse yourself with the morning paper, I will make the few additions to this deed, which, when you have signed it, will relieve you from much anxiety."

Mrs. Hobbs thanked him, and Mr. Daw proceeded to fill up an instrument called a deed of gift, by which Susan Hobbs, spinster, gave to Isaac Daw, gentleman, all her interest in certain sums in the three per cent. consols, on condition of receiving interest for the same until the time of her decease, from the said Isaac Daw, his executors, administrators, and assigns.

This document read so like a will that Mrs. Hobbs professed herself satisfied with it, the more especially as Mr. Daw read another paper which set forth the legacies to the faithful charwoman and the vacillating maid, and also conditioned that should Richard and Caroline Alderwinkle prove to be deserving the good opinion of Mr. Daw, they should benefit to the extent of the bequests originally intended for them.

Mr. Perry was dispatched for a neighbouring green-grocer, who was always ready to act as a formal witness for a shilling, and Mr. Perry being informed in the presence of Mrs. Hobbs that the testatrix preferred the amended form of which Mr. Daw had

spoken, the trembling client affixed her signature, which, being duly witnessed, made Mr. Daw exceedingly satisfied and comfortable for the rest of the day.

Mr. Hobbs then read the will of Isaac Daw, which was a testamentary instrument called a deed of gift, by which Isaac Hobbs, spinster, gave to Isaac Daw, gentleman, all her interest in certain sums in the three per cent consols, on condition of receiving interest for the same until the time of her decease, from the said Isaac Daw, his executors, administrators, and assigns.

This document read as like a will that Mrs. Hobbs pressed herself against with it, the more especially as Mr. Daw read another paper which set forth the legacies to the faithful charwoman and the vacillating maid, and also conditioned that should Richard and Caroline Althorpe prove to be deserving the good opinion of Mr. Daw, they should benefit to the extent of the bequests originally intended for them.

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CHAPTER IX.

SOME time had elapsed since the Daltons had returned from Hartsden, and Christmas was approaching. Miss Pragmore having sprained her ankle very badly had been confined to her room for some weeks, to the great relief of Jessie and Percy Clendon, who felt almost the same relief from her absence as persons long exposed to an oppressive atmosphere do when permitted to breathe the free fresh air again. Miss Pragmore's repressive system of management was not calculated to make her young charge either happy or ingenuous, and now that Jessie enjoyed a temporary freedom from restraint, her naturally cheerful disposition made her rather exuberant and in a manner defiant of those dogmas of extreme propriety propounded by her *gouvernante*. Percy Clendon was proportionably charmed by the discovery of agreeable qualities which he had not thought existent in his old antagonist.

Mr. Dalton also at this time became involved in some legal difficulties which affected him personally, and much of his evening leisure was given to the consideration of his own case, whereby the two young people were thrown more unreservedly together than they had ever been before.

Mr. Dalton was dining from home, and Jessie

had been doing the honours of the dinner-table to Mr. Percy Clendon. There was no fire in the drawing-room, which was approached through two folding doors, its windows looking out upon an enclosure at the back, which was pleasant enough when the poor ragged turf was positively green, like country turf, and the blackened trees wore their scanty covering of leaves; dismal enough on foggy November days, when the boles and branches showed like spectral skeletons of the old forest which once grew thereabout, when the Lord Mayor and the City Hunt followed the chase therein.

The cloth had been removed, and Jessie and Percy had engaged at chess. For some reason or the other both blundered egregiously, and a bystander who knew the game would have been provoked out of all patience at chances given and advantages thrown away. There is nothing more irritating than watching a game of chess badly played. It is a trial of temper which only the most tolerant should encounter. But there was no one to look on at our players, or they would have seen that when Percy should have been noting the disposition of the pieces, and watching for the movements of his enemy, his eyes were fixed on Jessie Dalton's face, as Ferdinand gazed upon Miranda.

"I can't play this evening," said Jessie, "and you let me win that last game purposely. I don't care to have games given to me."

Percy protested that he had not done so.

"O yes; you could have taken my Queen with your white Bishop, and — the room is very warm.

"Would you mind opening one of the drawing-room doors?"

Percy did as requested, and the servant having omitted to pull down the blinds, the great full moon shone in, and made the room and the enclosure outside almost as light as day — almost!

Percy went to the window and looked out.

"What a lovely moon!" he exclaimed, "and the dingy old gardens look quite inviting. Come and see, Jessie."

But Jessie did not rise. She was placing the chessmen in their box.

"The moon's at the full," continued Percy, "and even the chimney-pots are picturesque. The shadow of the old lime in the corner looks just like a man with his hair on end. Do come and see, Jessie? Do come!"

Jessie paused, just a moment, and then went slowly to the drawing-room.

"There, Jessy; do you see it? There, on the wall?"

"You've a strong imagination," replied Jessie, "for I see nothing resembling anything but the shadows of the branches."

"Only shadows! Sit down where I am," said Percy, rising from the window seat. The house was old fashioned, and Mr. Dalton had not sought to modernise it.

Jessie did as she was commanded, but it was some time before she traced the resemblance Percy had discovered, and not until he had leaned over her

shoulder — his cheek touching her ringlets — and pointed it out more clearly.

Then they talked awhile of a moonlight evening they had passed together at Hartsden, and that brought back other recollections.

"I often wonder now why we were such bad friends when we first knew each other," said Percy.

Jessie was silent.

"I thought you such a conceited girl that I was always trying to take you down. You saw that, I fancy, and so — hated me."

"I disliked you, not hated you," replied Jessie softly.

"But that has passed a long time — has it not?" asked Percy, making a motion as though to take Jessie's hand, but refraining to do so.

"I know you better now," replied Jessie, more softly than before. "Of course, I —"

"What?" he asked, after a moment or two.

"Why, of course, I am better acquainted with you; we have been companions, and — we generally like persons with whom we are well acquainted — better, I mean, than strangers."

"Mr. Daw, for instance?"

"Mr. Daw! Who could like him, I wonder! I always dread his dining with us. He stares at me with those ugly, piggy eyes, until he makes me blush. I hate being made to blush."

"He's a bold, bad fellow, I fancy, and I'll watch him when next he dines here." Percy paused, and then added, "I wish I were as bold as he is, without his bad qualities."

"Bold? Why, you are bold. I have heard Mr. Deering say so —"

"And yet, Jessie, my heart is beating so quickly that I cannot speak — cannot say — what is at my lips." — His emotion silenced him.

If the sun, and not the moon, had shone upon Jessie's face, Percy would have seen that it was blushing now, — one rosy blush, as though some inexpressible terror had possessed her, driving the blood wildly through her veins.

He had taken her hand as he had spoken, and that gentle touch had conveyed to her all that the most fluent eloquence could have done. She could divine what he would say! She knew that he desired to confess his love for her. She felt the blush upon her face, though she knew by her woman's instinct that his love was pure and true, or he would have found words, and only words.

He still held her hand pressed between his own. — One feeble effort to be free, and then it remained a willing prisoner. The bright moon shone upon them both, as though there had been a germ of truth in the ancient fable of Dian and her attributes, and that the Casta Diva approved of their chaste love.

"Jessie! Dear Jessie!" — Again he was mute.

Like one waking from a dream Jessie slowly opened her eyes, which had been closed, and having looked a moment at the speaker let her eyelids fall again.

We can record no more. What else was said was only in muttered words and broken sentences,

so confused in meaning that to write them down coldly — to read them coldly, would be treachery to those for whom we desire to create an interest and a regard.

We have elsewhere recorded our veneration for old maids in general, believing that many of them have arrived at that condition from misplaced affection or noble self-sacrifice, freely admitting that there are others who have deserved their destiny. Among the latter Miss Pragmore certainly must be placed. In early youth a despicable flirt, although Nature had considerably rendered her sufficiently unattractive to allow her but few conquests, and those of a mean order. In later years a morose, unsympathising prude, whose acerbity would have soured all the sweetness of Jessie's youth, had she not had a will and spirit of her own, which occasionally led her to set Miss Pragmore at defiance.

There is a fact in connection with old maiden ladies which we confess has frequently surprised us. It is their remarkable acquaintance with experiences which one would have thought had never been within their knowledge, and which renders them more liable to suspect indiscretion in others, than the matron who has moved at freedom in the world.

Of this number was Miss Pragmore. Though confined to her room, she still maintained a constant *espionnage* upon the proceedings of the household, and by artfully questioning first one domestic and then another, could at the end of each day have

drawn up a very fair summary of all that had taken place in her brother-in-law's house.

"Has my brother come home, Jane?" she inquired of the servant who brought up her cup of gruel on the evening we have been describing.

"No, ma'am."

"Is Mr. Clendon out also? I have not heard any talking for some time."

"No, ma'am — when I took in tea Mr. Clendon and Miss Jessie was in the drawing-room — looking out of window, I think," said Jane, who had her own ideas of what was going on, and which she had already confided to the cook.

"I thought I told you the drawing-room fire need not be lighted," said Miss Pragmore, sharply.

"Nor is it, ma'am — there's only a fire in the dining-room, where the candles is," replied Jane, rather maliciously; adding, however, "but the moon's shining in the room as bright as candles."

Miss Pragmore was almost inclined to risk a little pain and go down stairs at once, but, upon second thoughts she concluded that she was of more consequence than her niece, and dismissed the servant with a sharp "Very well, you can go."

But Miss Pragmore's wicked wits set themselves to work, and imagined all kinds of evil as likely to arise from that first holy confession of love, then passing from the lips to the hearts of those young innocent lovers.

And when Jessie came into her room to bid her good night, not waiting the return of Mr. Dalton, Miss Pragmore saw the flushed cheeks from which

the maiden blushes had not retreated, and — wicked old woman! — determined when the morning came to poison her brother's ear with her own uncharitable fancies.

What pleasant painful dreams haunted Jessie's pillow that night, the result, in part, of the self-questioning as to all that had passed between herself and Percy. Had she been hasty in the confession of her love? Oh for a mother's counsel! — even a woman's counsel — but she had neither at command, and so

“Out-wearied with her self-debate,”

she slept and dreamed.

There was little rest for Percy Clendon either on that eventful night. He had been betrayed by the passion of the moment into a declaration of his love for Jessie without considering whether or not he was abusing the confidence placed in him by Mr. Dalton. Should he not have confessed how he loved Jessie to her father, and obtained his permission to become her suitor? Undoubtedly Mr. Dalton would resent the ungenerous advantage taken of the free intercourse which had been permitted him, and taken now when Jessie was deprived of the protection of her aunt, and when her father was absorbed by difficulties which had come unexpectedly upon him. To whom could he confide the error he had committed? To Mr. Deering? No — he was a cold worldly man, and would put himself in Mr. Dalton's place, and who could doubt his answer? There was but one who, though young in years, was old in

suffering, and so made sober in judgment — Sister Milly, dear Sister Milly, and with her he would take counsel.

Mr. Dalton had an early appointment the next morning, and could not therefore wait until Miss Pragmore was prepared to see him. When Jessie came into her room to wish her good morning, Miss Pragmore was greatly depressed, and complained of being neglected and allowed to pass so many weary hours alone, especially in the long, long evenings, with no one with whom she could exchange a word.

"I am sure, aunt," said Jessie, "I would have stayed with you willingly, but the last time I did so you told me that my high spirits were too much for you, and that you would rather be alone."

"Ah, yes! but then I was in great pain — very great pain," replied Miss Pragmore; "but now that I am at ease and only require strength, I should be glad of a little society, even if Mr. Percy Clendon should be left to amuse himself."

Fie! silly Jessie! why should the mere mention of that name bring the roses to your cheek, and so betray your secret to your uncongenial aunt?

"I will come this evening as soon as dinner is over, if papa should not want me; and I am afraid he will be too busy with his papers to do so. I will come and read to you."

Jessie scarcely spoke a word at breakfast, and Percy was so unusually silent, that had Mr. Dalton not taken the abstract of a mortgage with his tea and toast, he must have observed it. And again at

dinner, two more foolish people could not have been found than the plighted lovers, but Mr. Dalton happily prevented them betraying their confusion by an eloquent *résumé* of a trial he had won that day DOBBS *v.* DIBBS.

When dinner was over, Jessie left the room to keep her promise to her aunt, and Percy being solitary — Mr. Dalton, immersed in a heap of papers at another table, counting for nobody — the letter to sister Milly was composed and transcribed, and in due time Her Majesty's mail conveyed it to Hartsden.

The letter began much as usual, detailing the few incidents of the past week likely to interest the receiver, and expressing the writer's hope that health and strength were being restored. Percy had then written as follows, and of all that he had ever written nothing had possessed one tithe of its interest for Milly: —

"We have always promised each other that should any great joy, any great anxiety, overtake us, we would share it together, and both have come to me since last I wrote to you. I have often told you that I thought I should never marry."

He had often since Milly's accident, and what interpretation had she given to his words? Had she ever associated them with herself and her condition?

"I knew not then, dear Milly, all the goodness, truth, and beauty there was in the world."

Hartsden was then his world, thought Milly.

"Do you remember the last pic-nic we went to at Brantridge Park?"

Well — how well! as it was during the week which preceded the misfortune which had produced so much change at Hartsden.

"Do you remember that the morning was dull and unpromising? that as we stood on the garden terrace, looking towards Hartslye, we could only see a thick curtain of mist, through which the bright July sun showed like a lurid ball, until to our great delight the vapour began to rise or pass away, showing first the quiet green valley and its little stream, then the clustered houses in the village — the grey church-tower from its nest of trees. Then the distant hills became distinct, lighted by the sun, making up a scene of such calm beauty as can be only seen from dear old Hartsden."

Yes, Milly remembered all that he described.

"We had often looked on that scene before, but never had it seemed so beautiful as when the dull clouds and mists passed away so suddenly."

Why did he linger as it were on the threshold of the confessional? Milly had some premonition of what was to follow.

"Such a change has come before my mental vision — such a transition from misconception to the full burst of unimagined beauty." (And this of Jessie Dalton! but it is a foolish lover writing of his first love.)

Milly read the last few lines over again, as at first she could not master their meaning, nor did she fully until she read on.

"Dear sister Milly, you often scolded me for what you were pleased to call my perversity — my obstinate blindness to what all the world saw except myself."

Milly's breathing was slow and painful.

"I acknowledge that you were right, and I a dull, dim-eyed donkey, that turned away from the sweetest herbage to feed on thistles."

Milly had to read this passage also more than once, and then she could only see an ill compliment to herself. Why did she linger now as it were on her road to the truth? Did she fear to know it?

"I am blind no longer! I have discovered all that you saw long ago in Jessie Dalton. I have dared to offer my poor pretensions in exchange for her love, and she has given it me."

The old flush came into Milly's face, to be succeeded by a death-like pallor. Again she sank back upon her pillows, but she still clutched tightly in her hand Percy Clendon's letter.

She soon revived, and without attempting to read more of the letter, held it out at arm's length as she would have grasped an enemy who had struck her a blow, and appeared to defy it to harm her further.

"Base, treacherous girl!" she muttered. "You, the friend I have trusted, loved better than all, except my father, to deceive me so cruelly! To profess a dislike to him as you have done — to call him by ill names as you have done — to jeer me for being his defender, and now to confess to him you love him. Oh, it's monstrous!"

She drew to her a writing case, and then wrote nearly the same words as she had muttered to herself.

She paused and continued for a few moments to look with fixed eyes upon what she had written, and then she gave way to a passion of tears. The relief she thus obtained from the suffocating sensation which had oppressed her, produced by her indignation at what she thought the treachery of her false friend, restored her also to a calmer state of mind, and after a few minutes she read Percy's letter to the end.

Strange that towards him she felt no anger, neither did one word of reproach escape her.

What had he ever professed himself to her? Only a brother, and now in his first great anxiety he had come to her for counsel. What he might have been, but for Jessie! God forgive her!

Mildred put what she had written into her desk, and then strove to understand to the full what Percy required of her. To give him her simple counsel would have been easy enough, but she could not do that without some congratulatory words on his engagement with Jessie, and those she could not write. No — not even if she could have brought herself to lie and have spoken them — but her pen would not trace the words. Jessie Dalton, her earliest friend, had hidden from her this secret liking for Percy, under a mask of assumed indifference, even when she had probed Milly's heart, as it were, to know if any love for him was lying there. What if she had discovered that she had loved? Would Jessie have

had the honesty to struggle with her own passion until she had subdued it?

Not she! False friend. Not she!

It was no unusual occurrence, unfortunately, for Mildred to keep her chamber throughout the day, and Mr. Deering had therefore no suspicion that any peculiar reason existed for her seclusion on the present occasion. When he visited her it required but small self-restraint to conceal from him the presence of this new sorrow, and he left his darling with the long familiar grief, — a belief that she was suffering from her old malady.

Mildred requested her mother to leave her earlier than usual that evening, feigning a desire to sleep, and with Mrs. Deering, to hear was to obey. But sleep was to be no rest to Milly throughout that night. Thoroughly out-wearied she fell into short slumbers, but waking again she re-entered the phantom world made by her feverish fancy. She saw herself as she might have been had nothing happened to mar the promise of her girlhood, more than a rival in beauty to Jessie Dalton, and conscious of an earlier claim upon the regard of Percy Clendon. He too was there, her constant companion as he used to be, but speaking sweeter words than she had ever heard him utter. Then Jessie Dalton came upon the scene, and Mildred recollected the poor infirm creature she really was, and scarcely wondered that her ungenerous friend, whom he had thought so pretty, should take him from his old playfellow. No, she could not blame Percy, he was her brother still, and had come to her for counsel, and told her how he loved Jessie,

knowing that he had a true and loving friend in "sister Milly."

It was not until her mother and the rest of the household were astir next morning, that Mildred really slept, and as she was never disturbed — rest being her best restorative — she did not awake till past mid-day. After she had dressed, and had been left alone to pray for the strength which she needed so much, she went to her sitting room, possessed by more charitable feelings towards her offending friend. On her desk lay a letter from Jessie Dalton. Having read the superscription, Mildred replaced on her desk the letter, unopened, as though she feared to read in it some unwelcome tidings.

Why? She already knew that Percy was Jessie's accepted suitor; but then he had told her so — her brother — and she cared not to read the story again from the pen of her rival. So the letter remained unopened.

Mildred lingered long over the slight meal which she called her luncheon-breakfast, and fed her bird, and put fresh water to some winter roses before she again sat down to her desk. She read again the superscription of Jessie's letter, and then quickly tore open the envelope.

Many young ladies have received by this morning's post similar communications from their dearest friends to that made by Jessie Dalton to Mildred Deering. It confided to Mildred the great secret of Jessie's engagement with Percy Clendon, and assured her that the writer had never suspected the interest she had for him until he surprised her by a con-

fession of his love. Would Milly blame her for the ready acceptance of his proposal, knowing how much they had been thrown together, and what a noble, generous, agreeable fellow Percy was? Little, Jessie said, had she thought, when jestingly accusing Mildred of loving Percy, that she herself should ever have to acknowledge her affection for him. She had scarcely believed Mildred's denial at the time (those were Jessie's very words), and was now more surprised, now that she herself loved him, how they could have known each other so long and intimately without such being really the case. But then Mildred had had so many to share her affections; her mama, her father, and so many kind friends; whilst she, poor Jessie, had been obliged to endure Aunt Pragmore and that horrid creature Mr. Daw. True, her dear father was always affectionate and kind in his way, but he was so immersed in his profession that she occupied little of his time and thoughts. Was it a great wonder then, that Percy should have found a ready entrance to her empty heart? She was, of course, most anxious to know what papa would say when Percy should speak to him, but a few days, she hoped, would set her at rest on that point, as she intended to urge upon Percy the necessity of speaking to papa.

We have preferred giving the gist of Jessie's letter rather than to transcribe it in full, the more so as it was perniciously crossed — a practice which we abominate and condemn, now that a penny stamp covers such a multitude of words.

When Mildred had finished reading, she re-

mained for a few moments lost in deep thought, and then she crumpled up the letter and threw it into the fire beside her. Having opened her desk, she took from it what she had written the day before, and threw that into the fire also.

Again she relapsed into deep thought, and so continued for some time. Having decided upon a course of action she proceeded to answer Percy Clendon's letter.

She congratulated him, she said, at having attained the accomplishment of an object which he believed to be conducive to his happiness, confessing, however, that she had been rather surprised at what he had told her, never having heard from him one word of his regard for Miss Dalton — and that was not quite brotherly. She then advised him to make known to Mr. Dalton, and to do so without a day's delay, all that had taken place, as clandestine engagements must be productive of deceit, and could not, therefore, be honourable. There was no warmth in any word of the letter, although it was signed, your affectionate "sister, Milly," — but then it was written by a sage of nineteen, advising a disciple of twenty-one. There was, of course, being a lady's letter, a postscript. "Tell Jessie, please, that I have received her letter, and that her secret was a day old. I cannot answer her now, having the headache."

Had Mildred written the heart-ache, it would have been nearer the truth, we fancy.

Percy was not elated by Mildred's reply, al-

though he resolved to acquaint Mr. Dalton with the state of affairs on the morrow.

But Miss Pragmore was before him, having written a very impressive note to her brother-in-law, requesting to see him for half an hour on most important family business.

"Good evening, Miss Pragmore; I am at your service," said Mr. Dalton, entering that lady's bed-chamber, to which she was confined.

"It is really so difficult to find you at leisure, that I thought it advisable to write to you, as the business I wish to see you upon admits of no delay. It concerns Jessie."

"Indeed! What's the matter?"

"I am afraid, my dear sir," said Miss Pragmore, in her most solemn manner, letting her words fall from her lips as sharp and distinct as the tick of a death-watch, "I am afraid that Jessie has not profited by the example and teaching which she has had from me —"

"Pray speak out, ma'am," replied Mr. Dalton. "What has the girl been doing to offend you?"

"I never complain of offence to myself, Mr. Dalton, or I should have to occupy more of your attention than would possibly be agreeable."

Well; Mr. Dalton could have said something rude, but he didn't, and Miss Pragmore continued:

"Since I have been, unfortunately for me, confined to this room, now three weeks and three days, you have been greatly occupied, I hear."

"I have indeed, and am likely to be," replied Dalton. "Pray —"

"You must not be impatient, if you please, as my communication is of no slight importance to you and the honour of the family."

"What, in the name of goodness, have you to say? What has Jessie done?" said Dalton, sharply.

"That which no prudent young girl would have thought of doing, without consultation with her friends. She has formed an attachment, sir!"

"What do you mean? Fallen in love?"

"Yes, if you prefer that phrase, sir," replied Miss Pragmore, deliberately.

"With whom?"

"One of your clerks."

"Not Daw?"

"Mr. Daw is a gentleman of too much —"

"Then it's not Daw. Is it Clendon?"

"You could hardly have supposed it was Mr. Perry," said Miss Pragmore, provokingly.

"Then it is Clendon. How do you know this? Has Jessie told you?" asked Dalton.

"Jessie! She would never make a confidant of me," replied Miss Pragmore, proudly.

"Then more the pity that you have not had the influence. Your reasons for what you assert?"

"Two evenings ago you were out to dinner," replied Miss Pragmore, not stimulated in the least by Mr. Dalton's evident impatience. "On that evening Mr. Percy Clendon and Miss Dalton were alone. As I sat here I could for sometime hear their voices when they were at dinner. Then, sir, there came a lull, and I ascertained, thinking it my duty to do so,

that they were playing at chess, a circumstance which accounted for their silence."

"Yes! yes! yes!" said Mr. Dalton, impatiently.

"Then, sir, there came a little more talking, and then a longer silence. I inquired of Jane, who brought me my gruel —"

"What they were doing there, I suppose? And she told you —?"

"Sitting in the drawing-room by moonlight without a fire or candles, and looking out of the window!" said Miss Pragmore, slowly.

"Well, what then?" asked Dalton.

"What then!" exclaimed Miss Pragmore, moved at last. "Why, what should they be doing but making love to each other!"

"And is that all you have to say?" asked Dalton, sharply.

"All, sir! Enough, I should say, to convince any sensible person that what I have said is the case. Jessie and Mr. Percy Clendon are secretly engaged. I know from my own experience —"

"I should hardly have thought so," exclaimed Mr. Dalton, rising. "Here have you been keeping me on thorns for these last ten minutes, leading me to suppose that Jessie had done something wrong or foolish, and she's been looking at the moon, and chatting to the only companion she has in the house, poor child. Good night, ma'am. I know Jessie better than you do."

Mr. Dalton went down to his room in the office in order to resume the consideration of some papers of importance; but he found it impossible to bring

his mind to bear upon the merits of the case, and that his thoughts would revert to Jessie and Percy Clendon.

"If what that old croaker has said should have some truth in it? I must speak to Jessie. Not that Percy Clendon would be a bad match for her were he more likely to make a lawyer. But after my talk with Deering — No, by Jove! I must look into this affair a little closer."

Mr. Dalton then put away his papers and went to bed.

CHAPTER X.

WE are sorry to make confession that Percy Clendon was somewhat of a moral coward.

He would be of age in a few days, and it had been long arranged that he should celebrate that important event at the vicarage, his kind old guardian the Vicar being still hale and hearty. His best friends also lived at Hartslye, and it was settled before Mr. Dalton left town that on his return Percy should be at liberty to take his Christmas holidays. Percy had resolved, therefore, — after due consultation with Jessie, who of course was easily induced to listen to his special pleading, as to the prudence of the course he proposed to adopt — that his letter to Mr. Dalton should be delivered to that gentleman immediately after Percy's departure for Hartslye.

It is but justice to the flying lover to say that he believed Jessie could not be subjected to any annoyance from her father, as the letter contained no retrospective information, and only had reference to the future. Had Percy been aware of Miss Pragmore's communication, he would have remained to have braved the impending storm with his adored Jessie.

Mr. Dalton had received many declarations in his time, but never one which had occasioned him

the same perplexity as that from Mr. Percy Clendon, and he set aside all matters of business to consider the course he should pursue.

In the first place he was mortified to think that Miss Pragmore should have discovered by the eyes and ears of others what he had never suspected, although it must have occurred under his very nose, as he could not believe that Percy would have ventured to have made his proposals so confidently had no encouragement been given by Jessie. Again, he was pained to think, that if it were so, his daughter had withheld from him a confidence to which he was entitled; but a little further reflection made him confess that he had given her, especially of late, but few opportunities for confessions of any kind, and a tender communication to Miss Pragmore, Mr. Dalton felt, was really not to be expected. So Jessie was at once acquitted by her kind-hearted father.

Then as to Percy himself. He had already debated his pretensions, and had not the obstacle of the promise to Mr. Deering stood in the way, Mr. Dalton really could not have urged any just cause or impediment why those two young people should not be joined together. But his old friend, Mr. Dalton knew, was hard to be turned from anything upon which he had set his mind, and in this matter the one strong desire of his life was centred, and no explanation which Dalton could give would have the effect of disabusing him of the conviction that there had been treachery on the part of the man to whom he had confided the secret wish of his heart.

Mr. Dalton was under great obligations to Deering. At this very time, but for large advances of money made by him, Mr. Dalton would have had to make sacrifices which would have been nearly his ruin; and these considerations, thought over again and again, left Mr. Dalton no alternative but to decline poor Percy's proposals to become a suitor to Jessie.

Mr. Dalton thus impelled, assumed, as Mr. Perryonet would have said, "the part of a cruel father," and wrote to Percy at Hartslye, but not dispatching the letter until next day.

Mr. Daw was invited to dinner that day, as Mr. Dalton did not care to dine alone with his daughter. The sagacity of the old lawyer, now that it had been stimulated and put on the right line of evidence by Miss Pragmore, discovered that Jessie was ill-at-ease, and he became nearly convinced that the old maid had not over-stated the value of her experiences.

"I suppose our friend Percy is by this time at Hartslye," said Mr. Daw, merely to say something, as Mr. and Miss Dalton had been unusually silent.

Poor Jessie's face was crimson in a moment. She hated to hear Mr. Daw call Percy by his Christian name.

"Yes," replied Dalton, who had observed the effect of Daw's speech upon his daughter. "Yes, and — and — I suppose he left with you the fair copy of Jackson's lease?"

"Well, yes, sir," answered Daw, smiling, "as far as he had gone; I've given it to Perry to finish."

"To finish! Why, bless me! Clendon has had it these three days!"

"Yes, sir, but then Mr. Clendon is not a fast worker," said Daw, smiling again; "and for the last three days he has been more restless than usual."

Jessie could have given Mr. Daw a good slap (we believe that is a feminine expression) for his remark.

"Mr. Clendon is certainly very inattentive to business," said Mr. Dalton, "and remonstrance is thrown away upon him."

Poor Jessie's appetite instantly failed her, and she desired the servant to remove her plate, an act which did not escape her father, who, guessing the cause, considerately turned the conversation to other matters of business. He was convinced now that Miss Pragmore was cleverer than he, and that the cruel father would have to be resumed after dinner.

Mr. Daw having taken a couple of glasses of wine, retired to complete some work in the office, and Jessie and her father were left alone.

Most of us, be our years few or many, have at one time or other undergone the ordeal of suspense between the revelation or the hearing of some unpleasant communication, which, though jocosely softened into "carpeting" and "wiggling," is really among the most distressing experiences of life. Mr. Dalton knew he was about to inflict pain on his beloved daughter, and poor Jessie dreaded an unfavourable reception of Percy's proposal, now that

she had heard how he had neglected "the nasty business" of the office, and which Mr. Perry could have done quite as well.

"Jessie, my dear," said Mr. Dalton, "I fancy I am about to tell you no great news when I say I have to-day received a letter from Mr. Clendon."

Jessie's bosom rose and fell so rapidly that she could not speak.

"It concerns you, my dear, and I see — you guess — if you were not already aware of its purport. You do — do you not?"

Jessie made a painful grimace, and muttered, "Yes — I think so."

"Miss Pragmore had already informed me that I might expect such a surprise."

"Miss Pragmore!" exclaimed Jessie. "Has she been listening?"

"I fancy not, but your question answers one I was about to put to you. You and Mr. Clendon have been — what shall I call it — making love?"

"O, papa! dear papa!" cried Jessie, running and throwing her arms about Mr. Dalton's neck. "Only a very little while ago! Only a little while."

Mr. Dalton was so much affected that he could not speak. He could only clasp his daughter's hands and then kiss them.

"Now my dear child, you must calm yourself," he said at length, "you must listen calmly to what I am about to say, and believe that it gives me pain to say it."

O, poor Jessie! She foreboded what was to follow.

"Both you and Mr. Clendon have done very wrong in entering into an engagement of this kind without first consulting me. He should have acted more honourably towards me."

"It was not intentional, papa," sobbed Jessie; "I assure you it was not. I had never thought of it, nor had he, I am certain."

"Then the wound cannot be very deep," said Mr. Dalton coolly — provokingly coolly, "and I am glad to know it."

"What do you mean, papa?"

"This, my love. There are reasons, very powerful reasons, why Mr. Clendon should not be encouraged in this folly."

"Oh, papa! oh, papa!" Jessie's tears choked her words.

"If you act so like a child," said Dalton, almost crying himself, "I shall not attempt to explain the causes for my disapproval of his pretensions."

"I know why you dislike him," cried Jessie. "Because he is not attentive to his business; because he's not like that Mr. Daw, a sneaking fellow. Percy will do all you ask him. I know he will for my — my — sake."

"Well, when he has proved that — I mean," said Mr. Dalton, "when certain difficulties are removed, will be time enough to think of his proposal. In the mean time, I request that you do not correspond."

"Oh, papa!" Jessie wrung her little hands.

"And I am sure I may trust to you, Jessie, not to have any clandestine meetings. Mr. Clendon

will be out of his articles in a few months, and — well, I will make my own arrangements.”

Jessie had thrown herself upon the sofa and buried her face in the large swansdown pillow, her pretty ringlets all disordered about her neck and shoulders.

“Now be a good, sensible girl,” continued Mr. Dalton, “and believe that what I do is for your good and for Mr. Clendon’s. I do not blame you for crying. It is natural, I know. But when you have had it out, go to your own room, and you need not say anything to Miss Pragmore.”

Mr. Dalton kissed the little hands clasped above Jessie’s head, and left the room nearly as sorrowful as the poor girl weeping on the sofa.

Miss Pragmore! Say anything to Miss Pragmore! O, how Jessie hated that cruel, strong-hearted old maid at that moment, believing as she did that poor Percy Clendon and herself owed all their misery to the machinations of Miss Pragmore and Mr. Daw!

During the waking hours of the ensuing night Mr. Dalton thought over the interview with Jessie, and upon the whole congratulated himself upon the result.

“It was quite right to nip this matter in the bud. Naturally, Jessie will be temporarily disturbed, but it is evident the affair has only just begun. I will take her down to Brighton for a fortnight. I want a holiday myself, and Daw can run up and down by the rail. I owe something to my child, and business must be neglected a little.

Clendon shall lodge out of the house, and ——”
So reasoning he fell asleep.

Many an old head has so argued of young hearts,
and then gone to sleep like Mr. Dalton.

The morning after Clendon's arrival at the vicarage was, of course, devoted to a visit to Hartsden. He was gratified at first to see the bloom of health, as he imagined, upon Mildred's cheek; but the rosy flush soon passed away. It was not the glow of health; her heart had betrayed its secret, but he had not eyes to see it. Mildred had, however, much improved in strength since they had met last, and she was pleased to see her old playfellow, and strove to make him welcome. They had talked nearly half-an-hour before either spoke of Jessie, and then Milly asked if her friend were well.

“Oh, yes, quite! She is rather vexed with you, sister Milly, for not writing to her as you promised.”

“I sent her a message by you,” replied Milly; “and now she will have you for a correspondent.”

“I hope so,” said Percy. “I wrote you a lot of nonsense I fancy the other day.”

“Well,” replied Milly, “I own I was rather puzzled to understand what you meant at first, but lovers are allowed, I believe, to be ——”

“Nonsensical!” interposed Percy, smiling. “I have been writing seriously enough on the same subject before I left London — to Mr. Dalton.”

“I am glad of that,” said Milly. “Do you think he will be as much surprised as I — as I was?”

"No doubt of it, for, I give you my honour, it has only been known to myself these last few days. Miss Pragmore sprained her ankle."

"What in the name of wonder had that to do with your falling in love?" asked Milly.

"Well, it shut her up in her bedroom," replied Percy, "and that set Jessie and me at liberty to talk, and — and then I discovered what a clever, charming, light-hearted creature she is!"

"No doubt," thought Milly, "showing off her best."

"I shan't rest until I hear from Mr. Dalton," added Percy. "I shouldn't think he'll refuse me, should you?"

"Well," replied Milly, laughing, — at least she seemed to be laughing, "If Mr. Dalton entertains the same good opinion of you as you and I do, he will not."

Mr. Deering came home, and found them together, and he shook Percy's hand more warmly, perhaps, than he had ever done before.

"I called at the vicarage," said Deering, "to ask you and the Vicar to dinner, and was glad to find that you had stolen away to your old earth here at Hartsden."

"I never found it stopped yet," replied Percy. "I often think of it up in that frowsy London."

"Then you've not lost your relish for the country? I'm glad of that," said Deering, "I don't hunt now, nor shoot either much, but I still love the Old Place, and wouldn't be made a duke away from it."

"Jolly old Hartsden! I should think not!" said Percy.

"But it must have a new owner some day, I suppose. If Milly had been a boy now ——"

"Now, papa," said Milly, "you have made that speech half-a-dozen times this month, and I shall really begin to think you are in earnest."

"Not I! Not I! my darling girl," replied Deering, fairly hugging Milly. "You won't let your old dad have his joke, though it's not often that he's in the humour now-a-days."

"I can't imagine why not?" said Milly. But she did guess very nearly. She knew that his strong paternal love made her misfortune a continual sorrow, and bravely — how bravely none knew but herself — did she strive to keep from him any grief, any suffering which affected her. He too fought bravely also, and only for her sake.

It was not until they walked out to the homestead that Percy saw how great a change had come upon Mr. Deering. His head was bowed and his step was slow and hesitating; his voice, too, when he was not under excitement, was tremulous and low, and time had been when his cheering "view halloo," or triumphal "whoop," had rung through wood and over plain. Those about his house saw the change also, and had marked it come on more quickly since the Daltons left, not more than three months ago. John Coppice and his wife thought they knew something of the cause, though for the lives of them they could not have given their belief "form and pressure." That Queen Victoria had

something to do with it they were certain, and they were wise enough to speak of the matter only to one another.

As Milly sat at the window of her little sitting-room, on the following morning, she saw Percy Clendon making his way to the Old Place. Such was his impatience, that at times he ran, and then continued to walk as fast as he could.

"He has been accepted — no doubt of it," thought Milly. "May he be as happy as he deserves to be, dear — brother Percy," and then followed a few words of prayer.

Her supplication was scarcely ended, when Percy, hardly waiting to be announced, rushed into the room. He was nearly breathless with exertion, but his wild, unhappy look was a sufficient prologue to the domestic tragedy, which was contained on one sheet of Blue Post, or whatever else lawyers mostly write upon.

"Rejected?" asked Milly, as she received from Percy Mr. Dalton's letter.

"Yes! — Plump."

"For what reason?" asked Milly, reading rapidly.

"No cause assigned. Not a word of hope. A plump negative." Percy was evidently confounded by his rejection. He threw his hat violently on the carpet, thrust his hands into his breeches-pockets, and then stared fixedly at himself in the looking-glass.

"Well, but this must admit of some explanation," said Milly. "Mr. Dalton must be made to explain

such an unconditional rejection. Papa shall ask him — and he will tell papa, rely upon it."

Percy hardly cared to adopt such a slow process as Milly proposed. He was for starting by the next train to London, driving to Bedford Row, and "bearding the lion in his den" — meaning Mr. Dalton in his private office.

Milly, however, knew that her influence over Percy would make him amenable to reason when the first gust of the storm had expended itself, and so he was allowed to fret and fume, and contemplate his highly excited, good-looking face in the glass until he became tired of not being contradicted.

Milly again recommended having recourse to her father, and Percy went forthwith in search of Deering. That gentleman was in his private room; a drop-bolt had been recently added to the door, and Percy had to wait a few minutes before he was admitted.

"Excuse me keeping you waiting, Percy, but I was arranging some papers, and did not care to be disturbed."

"It is I that ought to apologise," replied Percy, "but Milly wished me to see you at once on a matter ——" Percy pulled up.

What a strange light came into Deering's face! Such as comes with sudden happiness or new hopes!

"Well, my boy!" he said, with some effort. "Go on!"

"You won't be surprised to hear, perhaps," con-

tinued Percy, "that though rather young to be thinking of such a thing ——"

Percy could not get on with his story without stoppages. Deering's anticipations outstripped the speaker, and he exclaimed —

"Out with it. You're in love!"

"I am!" answered Percy, greatly relieved; "and now, Mr. Deering, comes the great favour I want you to grant."

Mr. Deering could scarcely answer now, his heart beat so wildly.

"Give tongue, lad," was the best reply he could make.

"I know, sir — that is, I've reason to believe that the young lady loves me — or at least is likely to do so, but I have here a letter from her father."

"Whose father?" exclaimed Deering, rising up, to the dismay of Percy, who replied —

"Jessie Dalton's!"

"Jessie Dalton!" cried Deering, adding thereto a polysyllable, which we decline to transcribe.

Percy could not believe his eyes — his ears, as Deering stamped about the room like one possessed. He called Mr. Dalton by a great many improper names; neither did he entirely omit mention of Jessie in association with certain feminine comparatives not at all to her credit, until Percy, provoked at such damaging allusions, demanded an explanation, which Mr. Deering declined giving, walking out into the garden, muttering as he went.

Percy was utterly confounded, and feeling him-

self insulted by the conduct and expressions of Mr. Deering, he resolved, after a time, to leave the house without seeing Milly. As he was descending the hall-steps, Mr. Deering came towards him, holding out both his hands.

"Percy Clendon," he said, "I ask your pardon. I am getting old and tetchy, and what you told me took me by surprise — very much by surprise. You shall know the why and the wherefore some day, perhaps. Come in, and let me know how I can serve you."

The two entered the private room again.

"Milly, you say, wished you to see me?" asked Deering.

"Yes, sir. I never do anything of moment without consulting her," replied Percy.

"And she — she knows — approves of all this?"

"O yes, sir. It was by her advice I wrote to Mr. Dalton. He has rejected me, and by her advice I now come to you to intercede with your friend," replied Percy, rapidly.

"Dalton has rejected you! I'm glad of that! very glad of that," said Deering.

"Sir!"

"Only for a reason of my own. Let me see what Dalton says."

Percy gave him the letter, which Deering read slowly.

"Short and prompt," said Deering. "I think I had better see him, if I am to do any good for you. We'll talk again of this to-morrow. In the mean

time I will consider what is the best course to take with this positive old gentleman."

Percy thanked Mr. Deering, and when he had heard the bolt fall as he closed the door, he paused for a moment or two for no particular purpose. He thought he heard a noise. Deering had thrown his arms despairingly on the table, and uttering one sharp groan, had become silent and motionless.

Percy wondered much at what he had heard, nor found a clue to its meaning for many years to come.

What would have been the effect of Mr. Deering's embassy to Bedford Row must remain a matter of conjecture, as Mr. Percy Clendon had unwittingly rendered mediation impossible.

Mr. Dalton, as we know, had been engaged in a lawsuit, in which he had the misfortune to be his own client. He felt himself, of course, an ill-used man, not only by the plaintiff, but also by his professional opponents, and had put the other side to as much trouble and expense as he could, believing that in the end the decision of the Court of Chancery must be in his favour. He was busy in his private office on the afternoon of the day following Percy's departure for Hartslye, when an officer of the court waited upon him, and after a brief colloquy, Mr. Dalton and he went away together.

Mr. Daw thus explained the matter to an unprofessional friend over their grog at the "Cheshire Cheese."

"The Court of Chancery is so exceedingly careful of its dignity that it stands no nonsense from

any one, and if it is more particular upon one point than another of legal *etiquette*, it is in receiving answers to its inquiries. Any neglect in that direction is called contempt of court, and the offending party is subject to incarceration in one of her Majesty's prisons. Our articulated clerk, Mr. Clendon, being entrusted by our principal, Mr. Dalton, to deliver an answer, has, from some extraordinary indifference to the business of the office, or from a forgetfulness amounting almost to criminality, omitted to deliver said answer, and the consequence of his *laches* has been that the governor has been walked off to quod, and can only be released after considerable expense and difficulty.

Mr. Daw had explained very concisely what had happened, and the indignation of Mr. Dalton may be readily imagined. He knew that his imprisonment was only a matter of form easily remedied, but he knew also that the other side would chuckle exceedingly over the adventure.

Mr. Dalton found more than one acquaintance in the Queen's Bench, to which he had been consigned; and the accident which had made him a prisoner, was laughed at as an excellent joke. Mr. Dalton, at last, laughed also, as, like a wise man, he resolved to extract some good out of the evil.

Mr. Dalton had been allowed to "chum" with an old client of his, who having wasted two splendid fortunes in the wildest extravagance, was now in durance for debt, and kept there by his friends, who considered the spendthrift was only out of mischief when under lock and key. Captain G— was well

connected, and had at one time held a commission in a crack cavalry regiment, but the straits to which his extravagance had driven him at times had alienated all his friends except his family connexions.

Dalton was surprised to find his old client not in the least depressed by his situation; on the contrary, the Captain undertook himself to prepare their supper and displayed a knowledge of the divine art of cookery that surprised the lawyer. Two savoury dishes were prepared in a short time, and whilst in projection the Captain astonished his chum by exhibiting his talent as a ventriloquist, holding conversations with imaginary bricklayers up the chimney, and making Dalton jump from his seat by the howling of a phantom dog apparently concealed under his chair.

The Captain had also a knowledge which he readily exercised for the advantage of both, and having obtained a sovereign from Dalton, left the room for a few moments, and returned with two bottles of excellent whisky, which he had obtained from some interdicted "whistling shop." From the pockets of the faded dressing-gown which he affected he produced lemons and a packet of sugar, and after a time proceeded to compound two reeking jugs of whisky-punch, conducting the operation to the music of *Il Barbiere*.

There were once on a time many such gaol-birds as the Captain, for whom imprisonment had no terror, but who lost within the walls of their prisons all

self-respect, and came forth from them accomplished tricksters to prey on friend and foe.

In the morning Mr. Dalton obtained his release, but felt shabbier for his night in the Queen's Bench; and from that time never lightly aided or abetted in sending an honest debtor to prison.

Mr. Dalton, on his return to Bedford Row, immediately instructed Mr. Daw as to the good he intended to derive from this unpleasant misadventure. He requested Mr. Daw to write to Mr. Percy Clendon as graphic an account as he could of what had taken place, and to inform that young gentleman that as his articles had but a few months longer to run, Mr. Dalton begged him to consider the time at his own disposal, as he could never more occupy a place in the office at Bedford Row. He (Mr. Daw) was also instructed to inquire to what address the personalities of Mr. Percy Clendon could be forwarded, as it was Mr. Dalton's particular request that Mr. Percy Clendon would never darken his doors again. The latter paragraph was put rather more forcibly than as dictated by Mr. Dalton, and in a vernacular more immediately pertaining to Mr. Daw.

Percy's mortification was very great at receiving this communication. He was, very properly, vexed at his own carelessness which had subjected Mr. Dalton to so much indignity and annoyance, and which had arisen from the utter absorption of his thoughts by Jessie, and the construction of the letter to her father. He acknowledged to Deering and Milly that his neglect of duty was very censurable, although at the same time he felt justified in resent-

ing the way which Mr. Dalton had selected to convey his displeasure.

"It is nothing less than turning me out of his house!" said Percy, colouring very red.

"Quite so," observed Deering.

"Shutting the door in my face! He could not have dismissed his housemaid with less ceremony. I call it ungentlemanly," said Percy, warmly, as he went on.

"It is not courteous certainly," remarked Deering.

"And to write by Daw, — a sneaking snob! I know that young gentleman's game, I fancy: a presumptuous beggar!" Percy was very red with wrath.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Deering, calmly, his eyes fixed upon Percy's face.

"Do, sir? I can only accept my dismissal. I am not likely to stoop and ask to be forgiven. I can use my time pleasantly, if not profitably," said Percy.

"And so ends your first love venture, I suppose?" Deering still looked hard at Percy.

"Not a bit of it," exclaimed that young gentleman. "If Jessie be the girl I believe her, she will be only more resolute in her opposition to Pragmore's domination; and I could swear that old Pythoness is at the bottom of all this discomfort. I'll have Jessie in spite of Dalton, Daw, Pragmore, and Company;" and so saying, Percy walked out without his hat into the garden, and it took nearly half an hour to freeze him into the house again.

Mr. Deering had retired to his den, as he called

it. He had intended to have pleaded for Percy with his old friend Dalton, and only because Milly had wished him to do so. But now Mr. Clendon was going to win his lady-love at the point of his lance — to carry her off from her father's castle despite the Pragmore dragon and the piggy-eyed Hippogriff, her guardians, Mr. Deering saw no reason why he should volunteer to be the esquire to such a hot-headed knight. No, let him go in search of adventures alone.

CHAPTER XI.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Deering's manner towards Percy Clendon was unchanged, he never recurred to the conversation they had had about the Daltons. Neither did Mildred mention the name of Jessie, much to the mortification of Percy, who would have been delighted to have made his love-blight the constant subject of conversation. The abstinence from all reference to the Daltons was so marked that Percy could arrive but at one conclusion. The Deerings condemned his presumption in proposing for the pretty heiress, who had the good sense herself to discover in him equivalents for the few extra thousands with which her father could endow her.

Had Percy suspected the real cause for the silence of father and daughter, the current of his life might have been changed by it. Had he known that Deering would have given with a thankful heart all his broad acres and honest savings to him had he become the guardian of Mildred's future — had he known that sister Milly loved him with more than the love of a sister, he would not have turned away from his first love, Jessie — no! not he — but he would have sought another counsellor than his old Hartsden friend in his late perplexity, and another pilot than sister Milly, when his mind was tempest-tost and driving to wreck and disaster.

A few days of such disquietude were enough for Percy, and, having had as friendly a parting with Mr. and Mrs. Deering as he had ever had, and with Milly something more so — her eyes filling with tears she could not restrain — the young lover took his departure for France — so he said.

The Old Place was bright enough without, its many windows all aglow with the rays of the sun, as Percy turned to look back upon it, wondering why he left it with so little regret compared to what he had felt in olden times. Mildred was still the sister she had been to him for so many years, and he could have wished that she had spoken to him again of Jessie.

More than one wayfarer, weary and footsore, had looked at the Old Place, lighted by the sun, and its trim garden a patch of paradise, with its bright autumn flowers and green lawns and hedges — looked and envied perhaps the happy indwellers, and murmured at his own harder fortune. Was such a wife as Mrs. Deering had become, a woman to be envied? Was Mr. Deering, broken in mind and health, his dearest hopes scattered to the winds, and his strong paternal love converted into a torturing sorrow — was he to be envied?

Or was Mildred's fate to be coveted? Her beauty wasted before its prime; her heart blighted as soon as it had discovered it could love; her friendship betrayed, unwittingly perhaps, but the pang of the discovery was not lessened by that extenuating thought.

The scheme for a happy future had been cleverly,

if not over honestly, devised, and there was sorrow everywhere within the walls of the Old Place. Deering had given up, as we have said, all field sports, which had hitherto formed his sole amusements, and he was now content to ride about his farm on his old hunter Jerry, made fat and sleek by idleness and good living. At one time, Deering would go to a meet if not too far distant, but the necessity for abandoning the chase made him melancholy, and of late he had foregone such a slight indulgence in an old habit. A few days after the departure of Percy — and lonely as he was, Deering felt the young man's going a relief — he rode out into the fields accompanied only by a small terrier, which was his usual companion. As he rode moodily along the side of a shaw, perhaps thinking of days when it had rung with the cry of the hounds, declaring that a fox was afoot, he saw at the extreme end of the wood the figure of a man who appeared anxious to avoid him. Deering fancied he recognised the fellow, and for a moment his lips became bloodless and the pulsation of his heart almost stopped. He soon recovered himself, and uttering a loud yoicks! dashed his heels against the sides of old Jerry, administering at the same time a sharp cut with his hunting crop. The horse started at this unusual treatment, plunged forward, and nearly fell, but a renewed application of whip and heel recovered him, and Jerry dashed away as he had often done before along the narrow turf ride skirting the wood. The noise of breaking sticks assured Deering that he had not been mistaken, but good as the pace was, the man disappeared be-

fore the end of the wood was gained. The quick eye of the old sportsman soon detected where the fence had been disturbed, but he was separated from the place by a stiff hedge, the only assailable opening being a gap recently mended with bushes and a sheep hurdle. To put Jerry at this was the work of a moment. The gallant old horse, conscious, it seemed, of his inability to clear it, rushed at the obstruction, which was fortunately rotten enough to yield to the momentum of the charge, and flying into fifty fragments allowed horse and rider to land safely on the other side.

Deering's eye had not deceived him. The marks on the bank and the broken bushes at the top showed the way the man had gone, but the trees and thick underwood made it impossible for Deering to follow. "In Whiffler! On to him, good dog! On to the scoundrel!" cried Deering, and the plucky little terrier, giving a few sharp yelps, dashed through the hedge and into the underwood. Shouting at the top of his voice the names of some of his workpeople, Deering rode to a green ride which he knew traversed the wood.

Reining Jerry into a trot, Deering continued to call for his men, and cheer on the dog, his eyes distended to the uttermost as though he would pierce through the interposing thicket. At last, Whiffler had found something unusual, and his short yelping was changed to snarls and quick barks. "To him, Whiffler! To him, good dog!" cried Deering, alighting from his horse with the agility of his youth, and then striving to force his way through

the entangled underwood. The dog grew more angry, and was evidently doing battle. A loud heavy thud, a howl of pain, and Whiffler was silent.

"D—n him, he has killed the dog!" cried Deering, held as in a trap by the brambles and undergrowth. "I saw you, you scoundrel! and I'll have you if you're alive some day or other."

But Deering was hunting the cunningest fox he had ever driven from Breezely Shaw, and he and Lemuel Binney never met again.

Deering, with much struggling, made his way back to the green ride, where he found old Jerry munching the grass, quite forgetful of his recent ill-treatment.

The excitement and exertion of this singular chase had greatly exhausted Deering, and with difficulty he regained his saddle. He was greatly heated, and would gladly have quickened Jerry's pace from a walk, but he felt he was unequal to the exertion, and to make the situation worse he was at the furthestmost part of his farm from Hartsden. Neither could he return the way he had come, as he knew that neither horse nor man could face the gap again. His ride home, therefore, was long and tedious.

When he arrived home he was chilled, and staggered as he ascended the steps leading to the entrance hall.

Deering went into the dining-room, and rang the bell violently. When the servant entered, she found her master seated before the fire, his face covered by his hands.

"Get me the brandy," he said.

"Yes, sir; my mistress has the keys."

"Mistress!" muttered Deering between his teeth.

"Well, get the keys."

When the servant returned, she found Mr. Deering seated as before. The noise the girl made opening the sideboard roused him, and he bade her place the brandy and a wine-glass on the mantelpiece, and leave the room.

Deering had filled the wine-glass with the liquor and drank it off before his wife entered the room.

"You are ill, Mr. Deering," she said, going to him.

"Ill? Not ill enough to die, I hope," replied Deering, savagely.

"God forbid!"

"Don't blaspheme, woman!" exclaimed Deering, fiercely. "The innocent are already sufficiently punished for our wickedness. The sins of the parents are visited upon the children."

"I do not understand you," said Mrs. Deering, alarmed at his manner and words.

"The more the pity then!" he replied. "I have known mothers who would have done so. How much of Mildred's sufferings are owing to you — to me perhaps?"

"What do you mean, sir, by such cruel words!" said Mrs. Deering, tears gushing from her eyes. "My whole life is devoted to her —"

"Your life devoted! You know you are lying when you say that. Devoted! So much otherwise, madam, do I believe, that if you were not her mother the same roof should not cover us another

day. It is only for her sake that I permit myself to keep terms with you — you ungrateful hypocrite."

Mrs. Deering, overpowered by her husband's violence, sat down and wept bitterly. Before Deering could speak again, Mildred came into the room. Almost mad with passion, he left mother and daughter together.

Mildred was for a moment or two lost in wonder, and then she went to Mrs. Deering.

"What is the matter? What has happened, dear mother?" she said, placing her arms around the weeping woman's neck.

It was some moments before Mrs. Deering could reply.

"I am glad, Mildred, that at last you remember you have a mother."

"I have never forgotten it," said Mildred, drawing her mother's face to her own.

"I have often thought so — very bitterly thought so."

"You were wrong, dear mother. Indeed! indeed you were."

"I am happy to believe that I was wrong," said Mrs. Deering, looking up into her daughter's face.

"I know I have deserved your love. Have I not been your nurse — your servant?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And often only thanked with a cold word — or a colder kiss?"

"I was in pain, perhaps."

"So I have thought, and never uttered one re-

proachful word. Did I ever?" asked Mrs. Deering, earnestly.

"Never, dear mother; you have been the kindest, tenderest, most enduring —"

"And yet your father has just told me that your sufferings have been increased by me."

"He could not have meant it. You must have misunderstood him," replied Mildred, laying her head upon her mother's bosom.

"It is long since that head has lain there, Milly," said Mrs. Deering, clasping her hands above her daughter's forehead. "I should have been happier than I am had it done so. Your father also —" but Mrs. Deering stopped. After a pause, she continued:

"You will always remember, Milly — it will be but justice to me if you do so — that I never spoke one word of unkindness against your father. He deserves all the love *you* can give him — all! But do not let me lose my share, undeserving of it as I am!"

Mildred answered her mother again and again that she loved her very dearly, and for the rest of that day Mrs. Deering felt something like the happiness she had once known when Hartsden had been a home to her.

Milly's interview with her mother did not end when they parted for the night. What she had seen when she entered the dining-room came back to her, and her efforts to understand its meaning became like a troubled dream. She recalled also many hasty words — much coldness of manner towards her

mother, which she could not now justify, or even explain to herself. She remembered also how seldom her mother was permitted or invited to take her proper share in their conversations or arrangements. How often her father had spoken harshly or rudely to his submissive wife, and this during long years — as far back as the time when her fall had made her an invalid. But she had so loved her indulgent, sorrowing father, that it had never occurred to her to question his conduct towards her mother, but now that she had become conscious of her own neglect of filial tenderness — now that she had “remembered she had a mother” — she was self-reproached and full of sorrow. She would strive to make the future atone for the past.

How many, like Mildred, have made the same resolve, but found over the portal of good intentions those fatal words, “Too late!”

Mildred dwelt also on the terrible truth she had learned of late. She had never entirely believed before — no, not when Percy’s letter from Margate had vexed her — that she had regarded Percy Clendon other than as a brother! but now that he was lost to her, she felt that he was loved with all the intensity of a first love. She had often reflected on her own condition, and had hitherto been rational enough to conclude that — as she had told Jessie — she had no right to encourage the sweetest hopes of a woman’s life. It was a hard conclusion for one so young to arrive at. She had schooled herself to bear with this belief. But then she had never thought that Percy might love another, and that other her

treacherous friend. Treacherous? yes, — had not Jessie suspected Mildred's love for Percy? Had she not confessed to that in the letter wherein she announced her own engagement to him? Mildred had at all times but a feeble control over her passions or desires — and now, when she writhed under this fancied wrong, she forgot the Christian duty of forgiveness, and allowed her wounded pride to obliterate all the old friendship which had united her to Jessie Dalton.

Still there was no abatement in her love for Percy Clendon — he had never deceived her. He had come to sister Milly when his heart was full and needed counsel and comfort. He had never suspected that she loved him with her whole woman's heart, but believed that the compact they had made with each other was fulfilled by her brotherly affection and confidence. And now that she knew there was to be no marriage for her, no husband's care, no wedded home, she seemed to cling more closely to him whose love was so near akin to the love which her soul coveted.

The future appeared to be full of difficulties. If Percy held to his engagement with Jessie, could Mildred master her hatred so far as to conceal it, and allow them to be seemingly friends? If not, would Percy observe the estrangement and resent it, and be no longer the brother he had been?

These questions the future must answer.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. DEERING had ridden his last chase — no doubt of it. The exertion he had made under the strong excitement of the attempt to capture Lemuel Binney, had overtaxed his weakened powers, and his ride home in the cold, damp air, had done the rest. For many days he was compelled to keep his chamber, steadfastly refusing to receive Mrs. Deering as his nurse, although Milly pleaded for her — but he was resolute.

The year closed unfavourably for a sick man — rain, and snow, and wind, beat about Hartsden as though to warn the stricken inmate that a narrower house was being made ready to receive him.

The friendly doctor thought there was but slight chance of recovery, and that could be only secured in London, where appliances were to be had which could not be obtained in the country. Deering became perfectly passive in the hands of his friends — proposed nothing for himself — opposed nothing suggested by others. He even submitted to receive the attentions of his wife, and not unfrequently gave way to tears when she had left him.

It was a sad parting from Hartsden. Neighbours and friends had said farewell the day before, and now all the labourers about the place had been in-

vited to take leave of their kindly master, and stood gathered about the carriage which was to take him to the station. The old hunter was brought there also, and Mr. Deering regarded his favourite for awhile with a faint smile upon his face; but after a time there came an expression of sorrow, and he waved his hand impatiently for the horse to be removed. As they led Deering down the steps towards the carriage he closed his eyes, as though he would shut out all which had been very dear to him, and which he might never see again. And so, reclining in a corner of the carriage, attended by Mrs. Deering and the doctor, he left the home wherein he had known so much joy — so much sorrow.

Mildred and Mrs. Coppice followed in another carriage, and in due time the journey to London was made.

Mr. Dalton had secured apartments for the Deerings in the neighbourhood of Bond Street; and as Mildred had written to say, "that her father would be greatly fatigued by his journey, and as quiet was absolutely essential to him, it was desirable that Mr. Dalton only should be there to receive them."

Mr. Dalton always respected his instructions, and was alone at the lodgings waiting the arrival of the Deerings, and he was painfully affected at the change in his old client and friend. It was with difficulty he could conceal his emotion, and did not offer to remove his hand, which Deering held for some minutes.

"I've come to London to be cured," said Deering,

at last. "My old friend here, the doctor, don't care to have the 'whoop' all to himself."

"You have borne the journey bravely, Deering," replied the doctor, "and who knows —"

"Ah, who knows? None of your faculty, I'll be sworn," said Deering. "However, do as you please with me. I've got to like physic — the nastier the better. Just a word with Dalton, please." The Doctor and Milly withdrew to an inner room.

"Don't go — only a minute," said Deering. "I don't want to alarm Milly, but I never lie down at night without — well, not a fear — but a thought that I shall not get up again."

"Come, come! not so bad as that," said Dalton.

"Well — be that as it may. I have tried to write to you more than once lately, but my head and my hand wouldn't work kindly. I wanted to know if that codicil to my will is a safe one."

"Quite so," replied Dalton.

"You thought me right when I made it. Do you so now?" asked Deering.

"I see no reason to change my opinion, unless you have proofs that we were wrong in our conclusions," replied Dalton.

"We were right, sir! If we meet to-morrow I will tell you something more — not now — I want to sleep to-night if I can," said Deering, faintly.

After making some arrangements for the next day, Mr. Dalton prepared to leave.

"Jessie shall call on you to-morrow, Milly," he said. "I am glad you have come to town, for her sake."

"To-morrow," replied Milly, with some effort; "I am not quite — sure; I mean I think I would rather get settled here a little first. I am a bad traveller — and — I will write or send to Jessie."

"Oh, certainly," said Dalton, evidently surprised at Milly's reply; and then taking his leave he went homewards. He paused more than once and gazed upon the pavement. He had his sorrow also, and was puzzled to guess if it had reached Hartsden. Mr. Dalton had discovered (by the friendship of Mr. Daw) that Percy Clendon and his daughter Jessie had exchanged letters of late. Was Sister Mildred cognisant of such a proceeding, and did she abet or discountenance it?

Percy Clendon had obtained possession of his patrimony and gone abroad; yet strange to say, he had never written to Hartsden. Milly, therefore, allowed herself a few hours to determine how she should receive her rival. She reflected that to cut Jessie entirely would create inquiry both from Mr. Dalton and her father, possibly from Jessie herself. Mildred felt that she could not tell a downright falsehood, and would therefore be compelled to state the true cause of quarrel. To do that would be to expose her own secret, and give her treacherous friend a triumph beyond endurance. No, for Percy's sake — for her own sake, Mildred would practise the first deception of her life, and contrive to make its repetition as infrequent as possible.

The invitation was sent after two days, and Jessie accepted instantly.

As a matter of course, when she entered the room, she ran to Milly, and put her arms about her neck, giving her "ten thousand kisses."

Milly played the hypocrite to perfection, considering she had never rehearsed such a part in her life. Some spasmodic conversation followed, which would be wearisome to repeat, and then a lull ensued. The time had been when the two friends would have chattered on for hours. As yet no mention of Percy Clendon. At last Jessie could keep from the great subject no longer.

"How unkind you have been, Milly, never to write me a word on my engagement."

Milly's face went scarlet, but she spoke composedly. "My father has been ill, and I put off from day to day many things to which I ought to have attended."

"Poor me amongst the number," said Jessie, with a pretty pout.

"Exactly."

"There has been such a disturbance, as you know, I suppose, and I would have given the world to have had you to confide in," said Jessie.

Milly repeated the word "confide" to herself.

"Oh, Milly, papa has been so unkind! And Miss Pragmore, a dragon! If I could only tell you!"

"You must not, dear," said Mildred, firmly. "I have no doubt but you have confidences which your father does not share, and I really — indeed I must — decline to be made a party to anything of which

he would disapprove. He is my father's dearest, best friend."

What could poor Jessie do but dry her pretty blue eyes, and lock up in her heart all the precious secrets she was about to pour into Milly's lap, as it were. It was well for Jessie that she had done so, or we are afraid she would have lost one or two of the dearest.

Jessie called daily on the Deerings, but her interviews with her quondam friend were few and far between. Yet she called, and Miss Pragmore often wondered what the two girls could find to talk about every day, to make Jessie reach home scarcely in time to dress for dinner.

Mr. Deering received no benefit from London doctors, medicated baths, and change of scene. Day by day he grew weaker, and all hope of recovery passed from the minds of his advisers.

He had asked to be told this, as he had a solemn duty to perform, but not until the end was at hand. It was fast approaching.

Mrs. Deering was seated by the bedside of her husband.

"You have heard," he said, "that I am dying. A day or two at most is all I can expect. I want to be satisfied of one thing, or I shall not die in peace." All this was said slowly and faintly. "When I am dead," he continued, after a pause, "what do you mean to do?"

Mrs. Deering started at the appeal, and could only repeat his question.

"Yes, I beg of you to answer truly. You will not keep near Mildred?"

Mrs. Deering rose up but said nothing.

"You know why I ask; don't deny it. It would only deceive for a few hours, as I am dying. Speak!"

"I guess to what you allude," said Mrs. Deering, covering her face with her hands. "If I have done wrong you ought to forgive me, if no one else can."

"I forgive you! No — why should I? What did I make you?"

"All that I can blame myself for being," replied Mrs. Deering. "True, you married me — for your own purpose, not for my good. You have treated me for years not as your wife but always as the servant. It was a sad bargain for both of us, the day I was bought and sold, sir."

Deering groaned heavily, and then said, "For the sake of your child?"

"Ah, my child!" her tears fell fast. "How I loved her — still love her — but you taught her by word and deed to despise her mother; and strive as *she* may, I never can have my place again."

"But you will go from her?" asked Deering, very faintly.

"Yes, if she desires it," replied Mrs. Deering, bowing her head upon her bosom as she spoke.

"I thank you for that promise." There was a long pause, and then Deering said: "Let us forgive each other — kiss me and forgive."

Mrs. Deering leaned over the prostrate man, and

for the first time for many years kissed his lips. After a few moments' silence, Deering said, "Ring the bell — tell them to send for Dalton." His orders were obeyed, and then Deering appeared to dose, and so continued for nearly an hour.

When Mr. Dalton arrived, and stood by the bedside of his friend, a momentary light came into the sleeper's face, and the end had come.

Mr. Deering was buried with his kindred at Hartslye. There were many true mourners, as he had been a good neighbour and a kind master; and the few earnest words of sorrow spoken around his grave did him more honour than could all the undertaker's trumpery, with which the vanity of the living mocks the dead.

Two or three old friends of Deering had been asked to join the family gathering to hear the will read. Mr. Dalton, on whom that duty devolved, appeared to be perplexed and hesitating. At last he went to Mrs. Deering, and said in a whisper, "I wish you would come into the dining-room for a few minutes," and thither he led the way.

Having closed the door, he said:

"Mrs. Deering, I have a very painful duty to perform to-day for all reasons; but there is one which affects yourself which embarrasses me greatly. May I speak plainly?"

"Certainly."

"In this will, as originally drawn, your late husband bequeathed to you, in addition to the money settled upon you at your marriage, a further sum of five thousand pounds."

"Indeed, sir?"

"I am compelled to tell you that he revoked that bequest by a codicil, which it will be my duty also to read."

"Why — why did he revoke it?" asked Mrs. Deering, almost in a whisper.

"His reason is set forth in the codicil," said Mr. Dalton, "much as I strove to prevail upon him to omit it. Shall I read it?"

"Yes," was the almost inaudible answer.

The codicil recited that in consequence of an intercepted letter from a person named John Knight to Mrs. Deering, it was discovered that she had been supplying him with money unknown to her husband; and it was evident, from the terms employed in the letter, that Mr. Deering's death was looked forward to by both as an event which was to re-unite the writer and Mrs. Deering. It was also clear that this clandestine correspondence had been of long continuance.

"And that is the extent of my transgression!" said Mrs. Deering, firmly. "Whatever respect I once had — love never — for my husband, or rather my task-master, was destroyed by his cruel treatment of me; and in my desolation — for it was that — I found comfort in corresponding with the only man I ever loved. Why have you asked me to come here?"

"To spare you the pain of being present at the reading of what I have just read."

"I thank you, Mr. Dalton," replied Mrs. Deering; "I will accept of your kindness. My last parting

with Mr. Deering was one of mutual forgiveness. I now understand why he sent for you; had he lived long enough he would have revoked that cruel codicil. Must Mildred know of it?"

"She must."

"That will be a bitter thought, and will be my punishment," said Mrs. Deering. "If you will delay reading the will for a short time, I will leave Hartsden at once."

Mr. Dalton readily assented to this proposal; and the noise of the departing carriage, and the information of who was its occupant, prepared Mildred for the explanation which was to come, of the unhappy estrangement which had existed between her father and her mother, and its cause.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE is a story told of an old woman who had carried the same pitcher to the well for twenty years, and broke it at last. "I knew I should do it some day," she exclaimed, "I said it would be an unlucky pitcher when I bought it."

And so, we suppose, old saws, old superstitions, and evil omens, receive occasional fulfilment, enough to retain their hold on the popular mind. At least Mrs. Hobbs's not unusual dread of the consequence of making her will, appeared to be on the point of realisation, as Mr. Daw received the following communication from his excellent friend, as he had been accustomed to call his confiding client. The letter was addressed to "Mr. Doors, Bidford Row, at Mr. Dalton's office, London," and was as follows:

"SIR,

"Mrs. Hobbs presents respectful comps. to Mr. Doors, and is very badly, which has continued for some days. Will you please come down as soon as you can possibly do so, as Mrs. Hobbs is uneasy in her mind,

"I remain,

"Your obegient serv^t.,

"SUSAN HOBBS."

Mr. Daw pondered for some time over this epistle, and was sufficiently disturbed by it to resolve — Mr. Dalton being at Hartsden — upon going at once to Moscow Row, Hampstead, where Mrs. Hobbs resided.

He rang his bell, and Mr. Perry answered it. "I shall not be back until two or three, perhaps, Perry," he said, "and mind you don't leave the office until I return, though it is Wednesday."

"I never do leave, sir, when you and Mr. Dalton are out," replied Perry, mildly.

"I dare say you are no better than the rest of your fellows," replied Daw, sharply, putting on his hat and overcoat. "A skulking lot, all of you;" and then he went his way.

Mr. Perry made no reply, the *conscia mens recti* kept him silent upon this, as upon many other occasions of late, when Mr. Daw had said uncivil things. Mr. Daw had become very bumptious, as many mean men will when they are getting on in the world, or believe they are.

In the course of an hour or so, a Hampstead coach set Mr. Daw down at the turning leading to Moscow Row — a colony of about twenty small houses skirting the border of Hampstead Heath, but intruding in no way whatever upon that Elysian field of the smoke-dried cockney. Another half-century, perhaps, will find that health-giving space destroyed by the brick and mortar epidemic, which seems to be blasting all the green spots around London.

Mr. Daw had not paid his excellent friend a visit

for some time, and he was greatly surprised to see how much she had changed. Her round florid face had become flaccid and veiny, and her eyes dim and moist, like those of one who had established too intimate relations with the spirit bottle.

"Well, Mr. Doors, this is kind of you to come so immediately," said Mrs. Hobbs, whimpering a little.

Mr. Daw professed himself always at her service, and the more so, when she complained of illness and distress of mind.

Mrs. Hobbs turned up her poor watery eyes, and shook her head as she replied, "And both of them is mine, I assure you, Mr. Doors, or I woon't ha' brought you down here; and perhaps you would take something after your ride, sir?"

Mr. Daw acknowledged himself equal to a glass of gin-and-water and a crust of bread, having a conviction that both were to be found on the premises.

Whilst Mary, the maid, was procuring these homely refreshments, Mrs. Hobbs went on.

"I was took badly, sir, that very day two year, when I signed that will and testament, and sorry I am I did it."

"Surely you do not connect your present indisposition with the performance of that act of duty?" asked Mr. Daw, smiling.

"You may smile, sir," replied Mrs. Hobbs, solemnly, "but I doose. It has never been off my mind, as Mary knows. Here's to your good health, Mr. Doors."

Mr. Daw "reciprocated," and Mrs. Hobbs went on.

"I feel as if a spell was upon me; the very night I come home, after signing my name to that paper, I thought I heard the death-watch in the chimney."

"Well, but you didn't die, my dear madam," replied Daw, cheerfully.

"No, I certainly didn't, as it turned out to be splots of rain coming down the chimney, and it frightened me all the same. I'm always dreaming of weddings, and that's a sure sign of a death."

"A — suppose we say that you've been thinking of some of your old lovers, and so —"

"O pray don't talk in that way, Mr. Doors. It seems wicked — indeed it does, and me that badly that the doctor calls every day."

"Perhaps that accounts for your indisposition," said Mr. Daw, anxious to disabuse his excellent friend of the absurd notion which had taken possession of her. But Mrs. Hobbs was dull at taking a joke, although an old one.

"There's another thing, Mr. Doors, which perhaps you won't laugh at. For this ten days past a dog has howled every night under my window. A nasty cantankerous brute, as belongs to the milkman over the way, and kills all the cats he can lay hold on."

"Then perhaps his conscience troubles him, and he can't rest at nights. I'll speak to the milkman," replied Daw, pleasantly.

"O sir, I wish I'd your nerves, and spirits like you," said Mrs. Hobbs, adding, after a moderate

sip at her glass, "and then them relations of mine —"

"Miserable, degraded wretches!" exclaimed Daw, "surely they've not been here to annoy you?"

"O dear, no; I've never clapped eyes on them for years — not since they was babies," replied Mrs. Hobbs. "But their mother and me was friends, and if we should meet —"

"Rely upon it," said Daw, not quite liking the turn the conversation was taking, — "rely upon it, justice — although undeserved — shall be done to your unworthy relatives: I'll see to that."

"You're very good, I'm sure, and mean well," replied Mrs. Hobbs; "but if it makes no difference, I should feel so much easier in my mind if that thing of a will was put in the fire. I should get better, I'm sure I should if it was."

"And have another prepared in favour of your relatives?" asked Daw, quietly.

"O dear, no! I'd never put my name to another thing of the sort, if all my money should go to Hospitals, or Income Tax, or paying off the National Debts."

"Distress yourself no further, my excellent friend," said Daw, taking Mrs. Hobbs by the hand; "consider your will as gone — consumed: and now get well as soon as you can."

Mr. Daw spoke truly. Mrs. Hobbs had no longer any will of her own as far as the disposition of her savings was concerned. Mr. Daw would take care of that. He was vexed, however, that his excellent friend had thought so much about the matter,

as it would become a duty to himself to maintain a more constant watch upon the old lady; for though he believed his right to her money indisputable, he had no desire to have the fact known, as the proceeding, he was aware — though according to law — was not according to equity or the honourable practice of his profession. He had, however, determined to become rich, and he had not much conscience to satisfy. Mr. Daw, having received his instructions, pleaded the absence of his principal as an excuse for departure.

He had given Mary an intimation that he wished to speak to her, and the girl followed him to the garden gate professedly to show him where the milkman lived.

"Is your mistress *really* ill?" asked Daw.

"Well, sir, by the way she worrits herself and me, I should say she was very bad at times," replied Mary.

"And drinks?"

"Well, it's no use disguising the truth, sir. She has left off tea entirely," replied Mary, rather ambiguously.

"What does the doctor say?"

"I've heard nothing from him," replied Mary; "but his young man who comes for him sometimes, told me yesterday he thought she was a bursting up."

"Breaking up, perhaps."

"Yes, it was 'breaking up.' She's indigestion of the liver," he says, "and some other long word. You see, I asked him because I've put up with

a good deal, looking forward like to — what shall I say?"

"A legacy, eh?"

"Well, something of that sort, or I couldn't have stopped, and wouldn't. She's promised me a deal, but she's been wearing a nut-brown silk every day until it's quite shiny at the elbows, and only yesterday she talked of having it turned. Now that's not fair!"

"Mary, you're a sharp girl, and deserve to be rewarded for what you have undergone," said Daw, kindly. "Whenever anything happens to Mrs. Hobbs, I will take care of you."

"Thank you, sir. You're a gentleman, I know, and I can trust to you." Mary was a clever girl.

"I should not — if I were you — allow your mistress to get too low-spirited," said Daw. "I fancy it don't much matter what she takes — brandy if she likes it."

"Likes it!" said Mary. "She'd live on it if I'd let her."

"Then let her," replied Daw — adding, after a momentary pause, "You're a good girl, I am sure, Mary, and there is half a sovereign. Good day: and, by-the-by, should any stranger call on Mrs. Hobbs, you will please let me know instantly. You can write?"

"O yes, sir, quite as well as missus."

"Or your young man wouldn't ask you to write so often," said Mr. Daw, patting Mary's shoulder.

"What nonsense, Mr. Daw!" but Mary tittered and ran back to the house, evidently pleased at the supposition that she had a young man with whom she corresponded.

Mr. Daw crossed the road and then made his way to the highway along which the public coaches passed, without however calling on the milkman.

There was very little sentiment in the composition of Mr. Daw, no regard whatever for the weaknesses of others; and the more he reflected upon the superstitious fears of Mrs. Hobbs, the more he derided them. He was gratified by the indifference she displayed as to the ultimate disposition of her property, and by the time he had arrived at Bedford Row he had determined to disregard her instructions, convinced that the deed of gift which he held was the most rational act Mrs. Hobbs ever performed in her life. Having arrived at this conclusion, he allowed some compunctious feelings to find a place in his bosom, and resolved to devise some means by which the perturbed mind of his excellent friend could be set at rest. In the course of a few days he again visited Moscow Row, and had the — well, satisfaction to find Mrs. Hobbs rather worse than better. It was evident that the old housekeeper had received her last warning, and probably would not stay out "her month." Mr. Daw therefore determined not to be in any way accessory to her "taking off" unnecessarily, and having, therefore, requested Mary to leave him and her mistress together, he produced from an inside pocket a long envelope elaborately sealed and fastened.

"Will you open that packet, my dear madam," he said, with his blandest tone and manner.

"Please do it, sir," replied Mrs. Hobbs.

To hear, was to obey, and the fastenings of the packet being loosened, Mr. Daw exhibited to his excellent friend a handful of paper ashes, as evidence that her will and testament had been consumed by fire. Quite true, Mr. Perry's fair copy of her first instructions had been so destroyed, but not the deed of gift. No, no, Mr. Daw was not such an honest fool as that!

The poor deluded one expressed her thankfulness, but though fully believing her own eyes, the specific for her cure was of no avail, and in about a fortnight more Mrs. Hobbs was gathered to her fathers and mothers and other relations.

"The funeral," as Mary wrote to her young man, "was most respectable, being black cloth, with a angle blowing a trumpet a top and stuck all over with cherubs looking for all the world like apple dumplings with wings."

Of course Mr. Daw thought that the spirit of the departed would be comforted by such trumpery, and he knew also that he should have the credit for liberality with Mary, whom he was desirous to conciliate.

The whole of the excellent lady's wardrobe was presented to Mary, (Mr. Daw could not personally adapt any of it to his own use,) and the charwoman, who set up a claim to certain personalties, was satisfied by two or three pounds. A broker was readily found to purchase the furniture, and set off the pro-

ceeds against the cost of the funeral, and so in less than ten days the key of No. 4, Moscow Row was handed to its proprietor, and Mary, with a month's wages and other gratuities in pocket, was on her way to her friends in the country.

To secure his valuable windfall was Mr. Daw's "most important business in the city," and for a long time no one — not even Mr. Perry — heard one word from Mr. Daw of the decease of Mrs. Hobbs. Mr. Daw had a long head, and he determined upon a singular course of action, whose policy it was not easy to understand.

He resolved to look up "The Commissioner," or Mr. Richard Alderwinkle, and having borrowed a *Bell's Life*, from a neighbouring public-house, he referred to the column headed "Canine," and found to his satisfaction that a dog show was to be held that evening at the same place as he had visited in the company of Mr. Bob, and that "the chair would be taken at eight o'clock by 'The Commissioner,' faced by Mr. Bloggs." It would be a rough gathering, Mr. Daw knew, but he had plenty of physical pluck, and had learned what is technically called "the use of his hands."

Having removed as much as he could of the professional gentleman from his outward appearance, by the substitution of a "bird's-eye fogle" for his customary long black satin stock, and the absence of shirt collars, he put on a loose overcoat and proceeded at the appointed time to the place of meeting.

The flash house at which the dog show was to

be held was up a broad court running out of a street in the neighbourhood of the Haymarket, and as Mr. Daw was about half an hour in advance of the appointed time he took a survey of the locality. The public house looked satisfactory enough externally, and the cluster of small shops about it gave the court an air of respectability. In a barber's window besides the placards announcing "Easy shaving," "Razors carefully set," "Hair cut for 3d.," illuminated from within, was an announcement in florid penmanship which gave some indication of "the doings" at the public. It ran thus: "Gentlemen's black eyes carefully painted out."

Mr. Daw was so far impressed by this announcement that he waited a few minutes near the door of the tavern he was about to enter, to note what sort of customers were to be his companions. The men passing in were mostly well dressed for their class, generally wearing loose shooting coats whose pockets bulged out more or less. Their easy, confident manner showed they were on good terms with themselves, whatever might be their relations with the world in general.

The light of the public-house lamp falling full on the face of Mr. Daw, an approaching visitor stopped suddenly and said:

"Why, Mr. Daw! It is Mr. Daw!"

For a moment the gentleman addressed did not recognise the speaker, indeed not until the man had spoken again.

"Are you for in here, sir?"

And then Mr. Daw recalled the features of a

certain kind of ticket porter who had no ticket, and who hung about the Law Offices in Chancery Lane ready to run on messages. He was there called "Joe," and a very civil, trustworthy fellow he was always. He was a changed man now in appearance. He too had the shooting coat, the bulged pockets, the confident manner of the other arrivals.

"Well, I was thinking of going in," replied Mr. Daw, "if I should not — be in the way."

"Not in the least on it, sir. You'll go in as my friend, and nobody'll say nothing to you."

"You are known here, then?"

"Rather, I should say, sir, rather. I'm going to face the chair to-night," replied Joe.

"Then — are you Mr. Bloggs?" asked Daw.

"I am Mr. Bloggs, sir, or Joe Bloggs, if you like it better, sir. You see, Mr. Daw, we must all have our relaxations and our fancies; now mine is dogs — toy-dogs," and he here explained the mystery of the bulged pockets by showing that his own contained each a diminutive spaniel about to contend for the prize of the evening — "a silver watch jewelled in eight holes."

Mr. Daw now felt that he was entering the canine world under the best auspices, the more especially as the mention of Mr. Bob Gore's name drew forth from Mr. Bloggs an expression of great respect for the worthy dealer.

Mr. Daw having taken two refreshment tickets, and Mr. Bloggs having paid certain "entrance fees" for his two "toys," they went into the room set apart for the show. It was an ordinary public-house

parlour, having tables and chairs ranged on its sides and ends, the walls being covered with sporting prints chiefly having reference to the exploits of dogs — fighting and rat-killing.

The Commissioner was a man of business and already seated on a slightly elevated chair at the end of the room, having a background of rather dingy red curtains, whilst before him — in humble imitation of the Cup display at Ascot and Goodwood — stood on a cigar-box, suspended to a miniature gallows, the silver watch to be awarded later in the evening. The room soon filled, and the chief peculiarity observable was, the number of dogs' heads resting on the edges of the table, their bodies being secured in the capacious pockets of their owners. The show commenced; but for the reasons already given, we shall make no record of the proceedings, merely observing that, under the presidency of the Commissioner and Mr. Bloggs, much better order and decent behaviour prevailed.

Mr. Bloggs was unsuccessful, but he bore his defeat with as much equanimity as his Grace, or my Lord, or Sir Toby, when disappointed of the blue riband of the Derby. Whatever was his mortification, he concealed it; and as the business of the evening was over, led off the vocal harmony with a song of many verses and a thundering chorus.

Having given his toast and sentiment and made his next call, he had leisure for conversation with his friend Mr. Daw; who soon contrived to lead it in the direction most agreeable to himself.

"O yes, sir — I've knowed the Commissioner this ten year or more," replied Mr. Bloggs, in answer to a question; "and I'm afeard he's a little shady, sir. He's got a good friend in a sister, I fancy — but that's bread I shouldn't like to eat, sir."

"I understand," said Mr. Daw; "and now, Bloggs, you must undertake a little bit of business for me. I can't stand this noise and smoke any longer; but I had intended to have waited until I could have spoken to the Commissioner. You must bring him to our office to-morrow morning. Come in first yourself, in case I shouldn't be alone. I want a word or two with your friend."

"Well, of course I could bring him," replied Mr. Bloggs, "but it wouldn't be pleasant for me among these here gentlemen if I put the Commissioner in trouble."

"Do you think I'd ask you to do so?" said Mr. Daw, apparently slightly offended.

"Of course I don't!" replied Bloggs — but he had thought it possible that Mr. Daw had some legal intentions to carry out not quite to the Commissioner's advantage; but when he was assured that the "worthy chair" would be the richer for the visit, the equally "worthy vice" promised to bring him.

The Commissioner looked very rosy about the face and eyes the next morning when presented to Mr. Daw, and it was evident that the orgie of the preceding night had been heavy and protracted. He was quite collected, however, and assumed his very best "commission" manner.

"I believe I address Mr. Richard Alderwinkle?" said Mr. Daw, after they were seated in his private room.

"Yes, sir," replied the Commissioner, sharply, "that is my name; and yours Mr. Daw, I believe?"

Mr. Daw bowed assent, adding: —

"You are a native, I think, of Chuckley, are you not?"

The Commissioner crossed his legs and clasped his knees with his hands before replying, and then, looking Mr. Daw steadfastly in the face, said, "I beg pardon, Mr. Daw, but I must ask you to excuse the freedom of the few remarks I am about to make before we go any further. It has been my misfortune to cut my eye teeth rather early. I never had much schooling and less pocket-money, and have had to scramble my way through the world as I best could."

Mr. Daw smiled and bowed slightly.

"Now sir, among other observations which I have made is this — that nobody ever looks you up unless he wants to get something out of you. Perhaps you may have made the same observation, Mr. Daw?"

Mr. Daw smiled, and said, "Possibly — partially."

"Very well, sir. Now, as some men 'make wood' from their capital, some from their credit, and some from the knowledge of things in general, I have long made it a rule never to give away the only valuable stock-in-trade I possess — my experience. And so, sir, I think we shall get on better

if, before you proceed with your examination of me, you just state your case."

"I respect your caution and your prudence," replied Daw, pleasantly, "and I am sure you will respect the same qualities in myself."

"Sir, of course," said the Commissioner, changing his attitude, and assuming one of attention by thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets and extending his legs.

"I am anxious to know — before I proceed to particulars — I am anxious to know if you are Mr. Richard Alderwinkle, of Chuckley."

"I am," replied Richard.

"The son of Peter and Jemima Alderwinkle, sometime deceased?"

"*Vide* parish register," answered the Commissioner.

"That being so, you had a relative of the name of Hobbs — Susan Hobbs?"

"Ye-es, a cousin of my mother. She was housekeeper in the Fortescue family. I looked her up a year or two ago."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Daw, somewhat interested by the answer. "Did you find her?"

"Well, not exactly," replied the Commissioner, coolly. "I heard she was living on a small terminable annuity, and with that information my interest in the old lady ceased."

"I understand," said Daw, laughing; "a troublesome old lady with only an annuity did not promise a profitable investment for your experience."

"Precisely so. Annuities are d ——— deceptive

things, sir. Many a relation has been swindled out of a good deal of time and money and soft sawder by an annuity."

"Well, sir, Mrs. Hobbs is dead," said Daw.

"Ditto her annuity," added the Commissioner.

"Of course. She was a client of this office, and when she was *in extremis* —"

"Where might that be?" asked the Commissioner.

"I mean, when she was at the point of death she sent for some one from here, and it chanced to be my duty to attend her."

"What for? What could she want with a lawyer, and only an annuity? I thought old ladies at such times sent for a gentleman in the other line."

"It was, Mr. Alderwinkle, to confide to our office the execution of her last wishes. To see her decently buried, and to take charge of a small sum of money which she had scraped together."

"Oh, made a will!"

"No, sir; she did not make a will. She placed in my hands a small tea-caddy in which she had invested her property, consisting of two hundred and odd pounds," said Daw, pausing.

"Don't let me interrupt you, sir," observed the Commissioner, having given a short cough.

"That money," she said, "I wish to go to my cousin Jemima Alderwinkle's children, Richard and Caroline. I don't know where you'll find them, but they were born at Chuckley. My furniture will pay my funeral — let it be a decent one; my clothes

you will give to my faithful servant, Mary.' Her instructions have been obeyed. She was buried decently, her furniture has paid the expenses, and her clothes have been disposed of as desired."

"Well, sir, I'm obliged," said the Commissioner; "and this transaction shall have a clean page to itself in my ledger."

"On that paper you will see that after payment to you and to your sister of one hundred pounds each, there remains a small balance of nine pounds ——"

"Costs," said the Commissioner — "costs; say no more, sir. You've saved me trouble and a shilling, as I should have looked up Doctors' Commons when I'd heard of her death — just as a matter of curiosity."

It was to stifle the curiosity of Mr. Alderwinkle that Mr. Daw had resolved to make this sacrifice of money; and as he employed himself in counting out the crisp bank-notes for the sum of two hundred pounds, he congratulated himself on his cunning and liberality.

"As I have not the pleasure of knowing your sister's address, I presume I do no wrong in confiding her share of this legacy to you."

"None in the least, sir," replied the Commissioner, with alacrity, wondering much, however, at the want of legal acumen displayed by Mr. Daw. "I manage all Carry's money affairs for her" — and this was strictly true, as he never allowed her to have five pounds unemployed.

Mr. Daw had drawn up an acknowledgment for

the money, which Mr. Richard Alderwinkle signed for self and sister in a handwriting that was more remarkable for the boldness than the symmetry of its character.

The Commissioner then produced a large business-like bill-case, within whose ample folds he deposited the bank-notes, taking the whole matter as coolly as though it had been an expected and everyday transaction. He was one of those cool-headed men that it is difficult to surprise by either good or evil fortune. It was his daily business to be ready for anything which turned up, relying upon his "experience" to make the best of it.

"Mr. Daw," said the Commissioner, holding out his hand as though he and that gentleman had been acquainted all their lives, "good morning. I'm a good deal about in the commercial world, and if I can help you to anything in cigars, furniture, wines — specially wines — dogs, or horses, I shall be proud to undertake the commission. A line to me — care of Jones, the waiter, at Garraway's — finds me in a post or two. Good morning" — and shaking Mr. Daw's hand again and again, the two worthies parted for a time, each equally satisfied with their morning's work.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE spring had returned, and Old Place or Hartsden was advertised for sale. There were those evidences of desertion about the still trim garden and comfortable dwelling which cast such an appearance of melancholy over the brightest spots, as though inanimate things were mourning for their old possessors.

A few snowdrops and crocuses forced themselves into notice in the borders, but there were no other signs that spring had come to strew the ground with flowers. The window-panes were dim and dirty, and the faded blinds drawn down within, still declared Old Place to be a house of mourning.

Mildred had been, ever since her father's death, a visitor at the Vicarage, as the estrangement between herself and Jessie had become so complete that Mr. Dalton had noticed it, and wondered at the cause. He had forbore, however, to question his daughter, as he had not been able to overcome his displeasure at her evident disinclination to accede to his wishes in respect of Percy Clendon.

He determined, however, to question Mildred when next he should visit Hartsden.

Percy had only once written to Mildred since her father's death. That letter was one of true brotherly

condolence, and every word was remembered and treasured by "sister Milly." It had no address, and though written upon foreign paper, had been posted in London. It had been impossible for her therefore to write to him in reply, and she could only attribute his long silence to the hurry of travel. She was not quite satisfied with this supposition, and it was not until Mr. Dalton had been two days at Hartsden, that the real cause for his silence became known to her.

Mr. Dalton had been staying at Old Place, giving certain necessary instructions to the auctioneer and Mr. Coppice, who continued in charge of the house, when among his letters from town he observed one from Miss Pragmore.

"Business before pleasure," he said, tossing aside the lady's epistle, yet still wondering why his sister-in-law should have written to him — a very unusual attention on her part. This feeling increased until he could no longer resist opening the letter.

Its contents almost stupified him, and he had to read it a second time before he could thoroughly comprehend the fulness of its meaning.

Jessie had eloped with Percy Clendon! — they were married, and though the wicked girl had not dared to write herself, the viper they had warmed on their hearthstone had enclosed a copy of the marriage certificate, and written a letter in which it was difficult to decide whether impudence or hypocrisy most prevailed.

Miss Pragmore ought to have spared her fine writing, as poor Dalton only understood three words,

"Jessie has eloped." "Unloving, ungrateful child!" He could murmur nothing more! Nothing that could more thoroughly express her condemnation. It seemed as though his life had stopped; he saw no future — thought of no past — only of the terrible present, all culminating in those awful words, "Unloving, ungrateful child!"

At last he rung the bell violently, and ordered the astonished Mr. Coppice to have some conveyance ready instantly, without considering whether there was a train to take him on. He prepared himself for the journey almost mechanically, and then stood waiting at the hall door — hours it seemed to him — the coming of the carriage; and when Coppice brought it round, he hastened to get in without speaking a word.

"What are we to do about the pictures?" asked Mrs. Coppice, wanting to say something.

"The pictures — yes, the family pictures — yes," replied Dalton, abstractedly. "Ah, yes! give this letter to the Vicar or to Miss Deering — they will understand," — and he threw Miss Pragmore's letter from him as Coppice, in obedience to Dalton's impatient gesture, drove away.

Mrs. Coppice hastily put on her bonnet, and hurried off to the vicarage, not daring to read the open letter in her hand, although her curiosity was extreme to know its contents.

The Vicar was greatly incensed when he had read what Miss Pragmore had communicated with so much prolixity, but Mildred was more possessed. She had, it is true, never contemplated an elopement,

but she had brought herself to believe that the time must come when Jessie and Percy would be married — when Jessie would attain to the crowning triumph of her treachery. And it had come, and all Percy's long silence was explained, and Jessie's persistent visits when Mildred was in London with her dying father — using her still as the means to deceive father and friend. Her deceit was base and cruel — cruel because she had deprived Mildred of the only one whose sympathy had given her endurance, and a shadowy hope that her life would not be altogether of remembrance and regrets.

Percy and his little runaway went off to Paris. In the heyday of their honeymoon, they both easily justified to themselves the course they had taken in thus clandestinely becoming man and wife. Percy considered that he had been treated unfairly by Mr. Dalton, and that the rejection of his suit had been made in a most ungentlemanly manner. Mr. Dalton had been the first to declare war, and Percy had a right to resort to all the means of offence and defence in his power. He was victorious: and success, we know, like charity, covereth a multitude of sins. Jessie had also much to resent — at least she tried to persuade herself that she had. Her father had displayed an utter disregard of her feelings and inclination, and for no justifiable reason had condemned her to what — she was sure of that — would have been a life of misery. And because she could not conceal her distress, he had treated her with studied coldness, which was evidence of a tyrannous will that at some time or the other might

be exercised to force her into a sordid marriage, or a life of single wretchedness like Miss Pragmore. Yes — Miss Pragmore! What had been her conduct during the last few months? She never spoke without uttering some cutting sarcasm or wicked innuendo, and if there was one reflection more consolatory than another, it was that of knowing that she had been completely hoodwinked as to all that was going on, and utterly confounded by the catastrophe of the elopement.

But there were times when Jessie could not excuse herself so entirely, remembering, as she did, many many acts of loving-kindness on the part of her deserted father — knowing how he had toiled for her, never breaking from his work for any selfish enjoyment, but always to make holiday for her. It was true that Jessie's youth had not been the most cheerful: business had prevented that. Had her mother lived, she thought it might have been otherwise, and dreadful Miss Pragmore only known as an occasional nightmare. The more cause this, perhaps, for her to have regarded the lonely man to whose parental love such violence had been done.

It was not often that such sorrow would intrude on her new happiness, and when Percy suspected, from the swollen eyes and glistening cheeks of his Jessie, what her thoughts had been, he was too generous to reprove or to resent this condemnation, as it were, of the course which his influence had led her to adopt. One day, when he had surprised Jessie in such a mood, she threw her arms about his neck, and laid her head fondly upon his bosom.

"Ah, as I thought," said he. "You are getting tired of Paris, and want to go back to England. Well, pack up, dear. I have been longing for this week past for a boiled leg of mutton."

"I am tired of nothing," replied Jessie, smiling; "not even of you, and you used to say I should be. But I was thinking —"

"Of what we should do this afternoon? Where's the guide-book? I fancy we have seen all the great lions. Let us have a drive into the country, dine afterwards at Phillipe's, and then go to the *Variétés*."

"Yes, I should like a drive into the quiet country very much." Jessie did not remove her arm from Percy's neck, but stood looking on the ground.

"Well, what's my pet thinking about?" said Percy, drawing her closely to him.

"I was thinking how — how unkind of my father not to have answered either of my letters — nor yours."

"He will presently; we took him a little by surprise, no doubt," replied Percy, giving her a gentle squeeze.

"And Mildred Deering, too; she at least might have written to you," said Jessie.

"Well, perhaps she might. But she too was kept in the dark, you know."

"Percy," said Jessie, very seriously, "I have thought again and again of Mildred's conduct towards me; and, remembering a certain conversation we had, I am almost certain that she loved you herself."

"As a brother, yes," replied Percy.

"No — as a downright lover; and that she has quarrelled with me because you loved me."

"My dear Jessie, I'm not quite a lady-killer," said Percy, laughing. "Milly is such a dear proper person — was so devoted to her own father, that she can't, just for the present, approve of her two naughty friends; but she'll forgive us."

"No, Percy, I am sure I am right. Perhaps, if I had thought so —"

"You would have sent me packing."

"No," replied Jessie, her face colouring. "No. I should have quarrelled with her when she treated me so coldly in London. I should have told her that she had professed to make me her friend — her *confidante* — and that she had done neither, but had spoken unkindly of you," said Jessie.

Percy placed his fingers on his wife's lips. "Not worse than I deserve, Jessie, I dare say."

But Jessie resisted the restraint, and drew aside her head, saying:

"Yes — and I know now why she declared you were good and all that, but you had one fault — a great one. You were unstable — fickle-minded."

"I fear Mildred spoke the truth. In some things, Jessie, I am changeable — in one thing strong till death!" He pressed Jessie to his bosom and kissed her forehead, and then said, gaily:

"There's love-making enough for two old married people to last the day, and now on with your bonnet. We can get a jarvey at the end of the street, and *par l'heure* him round the Bois de Boulogne."

Jessie was soon ready, and a *fiacre* secured. The slow pace at which they travelled was conducive to reflection, and after a short time Percy and Jessie were both silent — both thinking, though not quite in the same train of thought, of what Mildred Deering had said of brother Percy.

The weather was becoming hot, and Paris no longer a novelty. The happy pair, therefore, began to suffer slightly from *malade du pays*, and sigh — a very little — for the green woodlands and breezy watering-places of their native land. They resolved at last to turn their faces homeward, making a short stay at Boulogne-sur-mer, which was not then quite such an English colony as it is at present. The noble Britons who chiefly sojourned there were self-exiled for a time for various personal reasons, mostly to avoid the importunities of anxious creditors. Still there were many pleasure-seekers, free to come and go as it pleased them.

There is enough in the old seaport town, its queer ascending streets and ancient fortress, to amuse the stranger for a time, but the port and pier, with their picturesque fisherwomen and tarry seamen, were then as now, perhaps, the more enduring attractions.

A stiff breeze from the sea and occasional showers kept Jessie indoors, but Percy, well wrapped up, went out for a constitutional on the pier. As he was driving against the wind and looking earnestly at a fishing lugger entering the port with a split mainsail, he came in contact with another promenader, whose attention had been also occupied by the

damaged craft. Both gentlemen apologised, laughing at the collision.

"I was looking at the boat. She seems to have had rough weather," said the stranger, a gentlemanly man, wearing a short cloak.

"She does," answered Percy, facing about, not liking the rain and wind. "It's bad enough here, but I must have my walk."

"I'm only a dawdler, and can't stand this," — here a faint whine was heard coming from beneath the stranger's cloak. "Ah — yes. It's a pet of my — of Mrs. Craven's. She's an invalid — bad cough! horrible cough, sir! but she insists on Piggy — that's this little chap — a thorough Charles, you see — being taken out for an airing, and as she — that is, Mrs. Craven — does nothing but cough, I volunteered."

Percy professed to be — and no doubt was interested in the little pet so considerately cared for, and Mr. Craven — supposing the stranger to own that name — became positively eloquent on the virtues and value of Piggy, and was so delighted with Percy's attention and apparent admiration that they shook hands at parting, and commenced an intimacy which did not terminate on the pier.

Mr. Percy and his wife met Mr. Craven in a confectioner's the next day in the Rue de l'Ecu. Mr. Craven was inquiring for cough drops; and Percy, like an open-hearted Briton, introduced his wife to his new acquaintance. Their home circle was so limited, that this precipitancy was, perhaps, pardonable.

Later in the day Mr. and Mrs. Clendon took a stroll on the pier. As they approached the further end they perceived Mr. Craven seated by a lady, in whose lap reposed the dog, which had assisted so materially in making two strangers better known to each other.

When Mr. Craven saw his new friends approaching, a shade of discomfiture passed over his face as he rose hastily and came towards the Clendons.

After some commonplaces and a slight attempt on the part of Mr. Craven to induce a retrograde movement, Percy said:

"O, Jessie dear, there is the beautiful little dog I told you about yesterday."

What was Mr. Craven to do — especially as Jessie declared herself passionately fond of dogs — but to lead the way to Mrs. Craven and effect an introduction?

Mrs. Craven was some few years the junior of her lord, and had been at one time strikingly handsome, but her face now bore traces of ill health, and her hectic cheeks almost declared her malady. She appeared a little embarrassed at first, but in a few moments became eloquent in the praises of her favourite; and then the conversation diverged to other subjects, and in the course of a short time the ladies became intimately acquainted. Mr. Craven was evidently not quite at his ease. He puffed a good deal, and was frequently rather abstracted, giving confused answers to questions of no difficulty.

After much smiling and good-daying, and so on, the Clendons continued their walk, Jessie glad, she

said, to have found such an agreeable companion as Mrs. Craven would be — she was staying another fortnight — although she was surprised to hear certain inaccuracies of orthœpy — well, perhaps they were slips of the tongue, from nervousness no doubt.

In one of the by-streets of Boulogne there was — and may be now for what we know to the contrary — a downright English public-house, calling itself “The Yorkshire Stingo.” On the shutters and in the windows were announcements of Meux’s Porter, Bass’s Ale in draught and bottle, English Gin, and other compounds, established, no doubt, to mitigate the sorrows of exile to such of our countrymen as could not speak French or accommodate themselves to the wishy-washy potations of the *estaminets* of the place. The visitors to the house were not of the *élite* of English emigrants, and it would have been with some surprise had Percy Clendon seen his new acquaintance, Mr. Craven, enter the “Yorkshire Stingo,” as he did on the day following the meeting we have just recorded. He had been expected by a well-dressed man sitting in the little parlour, and whiling away the time with a cigar and a large glass of brandy-and-water, early as it was in the day.

The meeting could hardly be called cordial, as Mr. Craven merely extended two fingers to the other man, who shook them gently, removing his hat as he did so.

“You came last night, I suppose,” said Mr. Craven.

“Yes, sir, and a precious rough-and-tumble pas-

sage we had," replied the man. "I was awfully bad for an hour."

"I am not a good sailor myself," said Mr. Craven. "I thought it better to send for you than to write — as — as I must leave for Naples to-morrow."

"Indeed, sir! — short notice."

"Perhaps that is as well," said Mr. Craven. "You are aware, I have no doubt, that Caroline has been ailing for some time."

"I have heard so, sir."

"A cough — perpetual cough."

"What, hacking, sir?"

"Well, that seems to express it," said Mr. Craven. "Now, if there is one thing which distresses me more than another, it is — a person — a person with that troublesome affliction. You understand?"

"Very good, sir," replied the man, waiting for further information.

"Now, Caroline has had the best advice, as well as lozenges and all that, but the cough continues, and, to be plain, I can stand it no longer. I am getting ill, very ill, for want of rest."

"Want of sleep certainly is a bad thing," said the man. "Well, sir?"

"Well, I have made up my mind not to take Caroline to Naples. I have come to the conclusion that her native air may do her more good than anything else."

"Well, possibly — under circumstances — it might, sir."

"I have therefore sent for you, knowing your

strong regard for your sister, to take her to England."

The man looked Mr. Craven very earnestly in the face before he replied, and then he only said, "Well, sir."

"I guess what you are thinking about, I fancy," said Mr. Craven, colouring; "and you will find that I have not been unmindful of the past or of the future. Read that letter carefully when I am gone, and meet me here again to-morrow at twelve o'clock. Have you money?"

"A little," replied the man, in a tone that seemed to say he could do with more.

Mr. Craven so understood it, and gave him a bank-note, and then extending his two fingers as before, took his departure.

He was no sooner gone than the man broke the seal of the letter and read it with much earnestness. He let his cigar go out, so absorbed was he by what had been written. "I thought it would come to this," he muttered, as he placed the letter in a large black bill-case partly filled with other papers.

The Clendons had seen nothing more of the Cravens, though the weather could not have kept them indoors. Percy and his wife being in France were doing as France does — taking their *déjeûner* at mid-day at their hotel when Mr. Craven was announced; he came to say that he was suddenly called to Naples on important business, and had come to make his *adieux*. It was very polite of him certainly, and all sorts of civil things were said.

"Mrs. Craven? Oh, yes, she sent her apologies and *adieux* also."

At last Mr. Craven rose to depart, and Percy saw him to the stairs.

Mr. Craven evidently wanted to say something more than he had said. "Mr. Clendon — I — I — want to explain, and to apologise," but he couldn't, and waving his hand he hurried down the stairs.

Percy was puzzled. For what could he have to apologise? What explain?

Jessie was sharper than Percy, and she hit upon an explanation.

"Mr. Craven evidently wanted to explain why he could not ask them to renew their intimacy in England, and to apologise for not doing so."

"That was it, no doubt," and Percy kissed his clever wife for her ingenuity.

The man and Mr. Craven met again at the time they had appointed, and after an hour's earnest conversation separated, apparently, in amity.

The third morning after their parting interview with Mr. Craven the Clendons went out for their stroll. The boat for London was getting up its steam, and on the quay were the usual loungers apparently deeply interested in the proceedings on board the gallant vessel, even as though they had been all underwriters and largely engaged in "the venture." Poor fellows! many of them no doubt would have gladly stepped on board and gone back to the destined port of the steamer, but they knew

it would be to encounter avenging creditors armed with all kinds of legal weapons, and to have to exchange the freedom of Boulogne port for the limited confines of the Queen's Bench or one other of Her Majesty's prisons. The porters carrying trunks and portmanteaus were converging from all quarters of the town, and trucks also laden bore their proportion of baggage towards the departing boat. On one large box — possibly containing household linen — Percy thought he had read the name of Mrs. Craven painted in white letters.

The port bell began ringing, and passengers for England came flocking from the neighbouring hotels and lodging-houses mostly in such haste that it seemed they had only just made up their minds to depart. Among them was a well dressed man and a lady closely veiled, and no doubt she would have avoided the recognition of the Clendons but for the little toy spaniel which she carried and could be no other than the valued and cosseted Piggy.

Mrs. Craven saw she was recognised by the Clendons, and therefore stopped to bid them good-bye.

Yes, she was going to England, as Mr. Craven had thought the journey to Naples would be too fatiguing for her, and his visit was "entirely on business," adding

"Allow me to introduce my brother to you, Mr. Alderwinkle."

"Happy to know you, I am sure," said the Commissioner. "Pleasant day for the briny."

Clendon acquiesced in this opinion, and having

made the usual inquiries as to Mr. Alderwinkle's sea-going powers, bade the voyagers farewell.

"I am glad," said Jessie, "that we met Mrs. Craven. She has given me her card, and pressed me to call on her in London. I have promised to do so when we are settled, dear."

"Ye-es," answered Percy, "though I don't like that brother of hers. He seems a vulgar fellow, and many removes from a gentleman."

"Why, you have not seen him for five minutes," said Jessie, smiling.

"You may know some men and some women in less time than that," said Percy. "However, they are off, and we can do as we please about renewing the acquaintance."

Percy could not get that morning's meeting out of his mind, and thought of it many times during the day. He thought also of his previous interviews with the Cravens, and before he went to sleep he thought also that he might have discovered the meaning of Mr. Craven's singular embarrassment when taking leave of him.

It had been Percy Clendon's intention to have made a two months' holiday before settling down to the serious business of life, and he had, as we have seen, turned his face homeward. A party, however, arrived at the hotel where he was staying, on their way to Switzerland, and Percy became so interested in the account which they gave of that marvellous land, that he determined to extend his holiday and visit it. Jessie of course was delighted at the prospect of such a tour, and a further letter of credit

being obtained from Percy's banker in London, the happy dreamers retraced their steps to Paris, and thence took their way to Switzerland.

We have no intention of accompanying them, as descriptive tours in that direction have been somewhat over "done" of late. We acknowledge,

"Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains —
We crowned him long ago,"

but we confess to avoiding stalwart young gentlemen armed with much branded Alpenstocks, and well up in their Murrays. Not that we underrate the manly daring of the Excelsiors, however much we may lament the rashness which has sacrificed many valuable lives in the indulgence of an emulation which could lead to no practical good.

This feeling may be due in part to the fact that we are somewhat "fat, and scant of breath," and have long sought "the shady side of Pall Mall" for our summer constitutionals.

The Clendons needed more letters of credit, as Percy had resolved to remain in Paris until the next spring. True, he had purposed to have limited his wedding tour to a couple of months, but then the trip to Switzerland had not occurred to him, and he had now discovered that to live in Paris would be as cheap as living in London, whilst he could perfect himself in the French language — a life-long advantage — and which at present he spoke and understood very indifferently. Of course Jessie was delighted at this prolongation of their residence in Paris, as "the season" had set in when that gay

city puts forth all its allurements, and pleasure reigns paramount. It was March, therefore, in the ensuing year before the Clendons returned to England.

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER letter to her father from Jessie remained unanswered — unopened indeed for days after its delivery. He never mentioned her name, and had forbidden others to do so. He appeared to be entirely absorbed in the business of his office, but there were times when he read his papers mechanically, and had often to reconsider whole folios before he could master the bearing of them. His daughter and her fault could not be shut out from his thoughts, however much he strove to forget her.

"The ungrateful creature!" Miss Pragmore had said on the last occasion she had been allowed to speak of Jessie in Mr. Dalton's presence. "Enjoying herself finely, I've no doubt; but the time will come when she will bitterly repent marrying that indolent fellow."

"Possibly," replied Mr. Dalton, calmly. "Poor child!"

"Poor child!" echoed Miss Pragmore, "I am sure she deserves to be punished."

"Yet not as you would punish her, Miss Pragmore."

"I can find no excuse for what she has done — none!"

"I can," said Mr. Dalton. "Truly, it was her misfortune and mine to lose early, her mother. She has had no mother's teaching, no mother's tender guardianship, no mother's anxious watchfulness."

"Well, indeed, Mr. Dalton, I think it hardly fair that you should say that. I am sure I have watched her," said Miss Pragmore, sharply.

"Yes, and she has known it — known that you have watched for her faults only to reprove her — never watched for the good that was in her, to praise and encourage her as her mother would have done," replied Dalton.

"'Pon my word, sir! But I believe it is no uncommon case for those who have devoted their lives to the good of others to be blamed ——"

"Pardon me, I do not blame you so much as I do myself. I ought to have remembered that I had a daughter as well as a profession. But I did not. I should have remembered how delighted, how happy she seemed whenever I tore myself away from making money, to spend a few days of leisure with her; I remember all now, and would give much to recall the past."

"Then I suppose you mean to forgive her?" asked Miss Pragmore, in a tone which implied that, if he did, it would be a great injustice to some one. Mr. Dalton evidently understood the meaning of the inquiry, as he answered,

"No, not as you mean forgiveness — be easy upon that point. She has wounded my pride, and done violence to my affection. She has scorned my counsel, and considered my care for her future as

an act of parental tyranny against which she was justified in rebelling. A mother would have been listened to because she would have been a better remonstrant — any woman would have been so."

"And yet you would not trust me to talk to her!" said Miss Pragmore, bridling up, but Mr. Dalton took no notice of her implied displeasure.

"As for Mr. Clendon, I consider his conduct cowardly, ungentlemanly, dishonest — and I will never forgive *him*. Never! I foresaw the course he would run, and I shall not be mistaken — I would not raise a finger to prevent it. She will then acknowledge her father's love and experience were not interposed between her and her fancy from caprice or avarice, or whatever unworthy motive she assigned to my conduct. When she has learned that lesson ——" Mr. Dalton paused.

"What then, sir?"

"I shall be guided by circumstances," answered Mr. Dalton, rising. "I have now said all I wish to say on this painful subject, Miss Pragmore, and therefore for the future I beg that you never mention her name, or refer to her in any way in my presence. You will be kind enough to comply with this request!"

Mr. Dalton did not wait for a reply, but left the room; and Miss Pragmore concluded after a few minutes' reflection, that if she would retain her comfortable quarters under the roof of her brother-in-law (as she called Mr. Dalton) she must talk elsewhere of Jessie's disobedience.

The business in Bedford Row, though not a large

one, had always been very profitable, and it had increased so rapidly of late, that two additional clerks had been provided with stools in the office, besides the one Mr. Perry had vacated some time ago. When Mr. Daw projected looking up Mr. Alderwinkle, he sagely concluded that Mr. Perry would be better out of the way, and therefore he commenced a series of petty annoyances to that embryo Roscius, culminating in a peremptory demand that he should remain over his usual time on one of the sacred Wednesdays.

Mr. Perry was defiant, and as Mr. Daw assured his principal that the business of the office required the protracted attendance of the junior clerk, the recusant had only the alternative to stay or resign. He chose the latter course, and buttoning up his coat to its last button, and placing his shining hat on one side of his head, he thus addressed his oppressor:

"Mr. Daw. Sir! So long as my professional services were appreciated in this office by my principal — although inadequately remunerated — I was content to bear with the petty tyranny of you — my equal, only one stool removed. I will bear no longer! To do so would make me a thing for scorn to point at! I hurl my situation in your face!"
Exit Mr. Perry.

The increase of employment brought an increase of anxiety, and Mr. Dalton began to be sensible of the effects of his constant labour. His great stimulus to work was gone, and he only encouraged occupation to keep him from remembering what he had

lost. Suddenly he was reminded that there was a limit to exertion, and for nearly three weeks he was forbidden to attend to business. The warning was not without its effect, and dreading the possible ending to such mental exhaustion, he determined to relieve himself by taking a partner.

Mr. Daw had become of value to the practice, and recent circumstances had made him a more confidential friend and adviser to Mr. Dalton than he might otherwise have become.

"Mr. Daw," Dalton said, "I must not risk another shaking like that I have just had. I must pull up."

"I should, sir. I really should, sir," replied Daw, "I wish you would leave more to me. The other clerks are hardly fully employed now and then."

"I have been thinking of dividing my labour with some one," said Mr. Dalton, "and I should much prefer doing so with you than with a stranger; but I must look to the ultimate disposal of the practice, and that would take money."

"Of course, sir," said Daw, almost gasping for breath at the suddenness of this resolution of his employer, and his own inability to avail himself of such a chance of becoming rich.

"You know pretty well what the practice is worth, and I have thought that a half-share to an active participator in the duties of the office would be worth three thousand pounds."

"Three thousand pounds!" echoed Daw.

"And the option of buying the remaining moiety

whenever I chose to relinquish it, for a similar amount."

"Very good, sir," said Daw, "and of course the first three thousand down, sir."

"I should expect that," replied Dalton. "Do you see your way to meet my views? You said something one evening I remember about having had a legacy — I forget what, as I was much disturbed at the time."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir;" answered Daw, a little confused, as he did not remember having mentioned Mrs. Hobbs' windfall to any one; "but it is not enough to compass a partnership."

"Well, cast about amongst your friends," said Mr. Dalton. "There is no hurry; I should be glad to have you with me; and I am sure the practice would be a bargain."

Mr. Daw thought so, knew so; and he withdrew to his own office in a state of considerable perturbation. There seemed to be little use in writing down one thousand pounds and deducting it from three thousand, the result was always the same; and yet Mr. Daw continued to do this at intervals for nearly half-an-hour. He had no friends who could help him to make up the deficit — none to whom he could go for advice, and "financing" was not then so well understood as it is now, or Mr. Daw might have discovered some ingenious plan of increasing his nest eggs. But there was no golden goose within his knowledge which had such fecundity. It was predestined, however, that Mr. Daw was to grow rich; and, as though by inspiration, he thought of

the Commissioner, of whose singular business talents he had frequently availed himself, and made small ventures which had been productive generally of considerable profit — less “the commission.” He therefore wrote to Mr. Alderwinkle to meet him at his lodgings in the evening; and as the Commissioner, to do him justice, was always attentive to business, the appointment was duly kept.

“Well, my Trojan,” said Dick — he and Mr. Daw had become thus familiar — as he entered the room. “‘You always find the Spectre Monarch punctual.’ The line is not in Shakspeare. What’s on the *tappy*?”

“Something of consequence, you may be sure, or I should not have sent for *you*,” replied the Trojan. “Will you have some tea?”

“No, thank you; I took mine at breakfast, and I am ordered by my physician not to Bohea more than once a day.”

“Well, you’ll find the liqueur-stand and a glass in the cupboard, and there’s a cigar in the china thing on the mantel-shelf; so help yourself. Do you like it cold?”

“Hot — always hot after dinner — helps digestion: though I fancy I come of the ostrich family, and they manage tenpenny nails,” replied the Commissioner, complying with his friend’s various requests, and after a few minutes being fully prepared to listen to what “was up.”

Mr. Daw, having replenished a large breakfast-cup with tea, proceeded to open his case.

He told the Commissioner the proposal which

had been conditionally made to him by Mr. Dalton, and the sum of money it would require to effect a partnership. He also told him that he had a thousand pounds, but he was silent as to the source whence he had obtained it, or possibly Mr. Alderwinkle might have been less friendly than he continued to be.

"You see, therefore, Dick, that I am two thousand short; and the practice is worth half as much again."

"Two thousand pounds is a dollop," said Dick. "No security, I suppose?"

"None."

"No rich client?"

"None — that would help me now."

"Jews won't do, of course?"

"Forty per cent. Eight hundred a-year. — No, certainly not — at present," answered Daw, hesitatingly.

"Well, I suppose I shan't surprise you when I say that I don't think my credit in the City is up to two thousand quid without tangible security; and the balance at my banker's don't touch that by two oughts, I'm certain. Two thousand *is* a dollop!"

"It is. Is there no old scheme of yours for raising the wind which we could enlarge upon?" asked Daw despairingly.

"I'm afraid not. Wines — I've done a good deal with wines in my time; and just now I'm on to a cove who sells real stuff, and whose name might work off a butt or two of Hamburg or *Bene*

carlo — but two thousand! No — wines are no good,” said the Commissioner, shaking his head.

“They might help,” suggested Mr. Daw, “and you can have money.”

“Yes — very true — money!” mused the Commissioner. “Pictures, now! — I’ve done well with pictures; but the man that used to paint my Courageos, and Rembranks, and other fellows, has gone abroad for more originals. Besides, the old ’uns are gone out of fashion. People buy the moderns, and they’re of no use.”

“How so?”

“Why, buyers ask you to ‘verify;’ and if the copy’s ever so well done, I’m — if any of them conceited painters will put their names to it and own it; no — not if you offer to ‘whack’ the profit. No — pictures is no go, my black-bird.”

Mr. Daw abstractedly sought to replenish his cup, but fortunately for him the tea was exhausted. Three breakfast-cups at a sitting!

The Commissioner followed his friend’s example with more success; and lighting a powerful cheroot, of which he always carried a supply, cigars being a favourite article of commerce with him, he fell into a brown study which lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour. Mr. Daw having nothing hopeful to suggest, did not disturb him.

The Commissioner broke the silence with a very singular question.

“Isaac, my son, do you believe in angels?”

The question was so unexpected, and so curtly

put that Mr. Daw could not make up his mind whether he had such belief or not, and then replied:

"Well — I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"Because, if you did, I think you'd say I was one; never mind the colour — but you would say I was your good angel, Ikey."

"Prove it," said Daw.

"If I understand your character right," continued the Commissioner, assuming his usual attitude of impressiveness; that is, stretching out his legs and thrusting his hands to the bottom of his trousers pockets, and then repeating, "If I understand your character right, you don't mean to let trifles stand between you and the main chance. Now do you?"

"Not *trifles*, certainly. You approve of that?"

"To the full," answered the Commissioner, with great emphasis. "I respect the law — I look at the law of a case always, and I take care to keep on the right side of the fence, but I feel justified in going right up to it, and sometimes writing my name on the palings — that's all right, because the law knew what it was about when it put up its fence; if it didn't it was an ass, Ikey."

Daw nodded affirmatively.

"Well, that's for the legal part of my rule in life. Now, there's what's called 'social observances,' which means laws for which no one can be lagged, or quoded; but which controls the liberty of the subject a good deal, if you are nasty particular about them. Do you understand what I mean, Ikey?"

"Well, not quite clearly," was the reply, though Mr. Daw hardly did himself justice in saying this.

"Then we'll take a case in point. Suppose there is something very much to your interest, but you can't get it without blacking your fingers a little. I mean that some very nice people will say you have dirtied your hands, though you don't seem to see it, or suffer any inconvenience if you have done so?"

"Ah! I see what you mean. You mean that there are some transactions which fastidious people condemn as being not quite honourable, not quite — not quite ——"

"The cheese," added the Commissioner, who was rather discursive in his metaphors. "If a fellow's ill, he takes physic because he thinks it will do him good. Don't he?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then you're not well — well enough off I mean — got a tightness of the chest. Would you mind swallowing a little unpleasantness if I could relieve you."

"Most decidedly not!" replied Daw, instantly. "What is it?"

"Well, I must make inquiries of other parties," replied the Commissioner, holding in his confidence; "but I'll say this much — I fancy I see my way of putting some three thousand pounds into your pocket — bang! — and no taking it out again or paying interest either."

"What nonsense!" said Daw. "I'm not in the humour for joking."

"Nor me neither," replied Alderwinkle. "I mean

business; so tell me, Ikey, if I can do this for you, what commission will you stand?"

"Are you really serious?" asked Daw, in surprise.

"I am; though, mind you, I don't say positively I can do this: perhaps you may object, perhaps other parties may object, but I'll try; and if I succeed, will you stand twenty per cent. up to five hundred?"

"With pleasure, Dick!" exclaimed Daw, adding, "And now, what is your plan?"

"For the present I am dark, if you please; there's no hurry for the money for a week or so, and it may take that time to work the oracle."

Mr. Daw could not help doubting for more reasons than one his friend's capacity for realising this great conception, and therefore he asked:

"But why, Dick, don't you secure this money for yourself?"

"I thought you'd ask that," replied the Commissioner, laughing. "If I could do so, my dear Ikey, you'd have heard nothing about it. I'm not such a — fool as that. No, I'll take this business in hand at once; and in a day or two, perhaps sooner, you shall have the offer in black and white, and have a look at the goods."

After a few more words Mr. Alderwinkle took his departure, leaving Mr. Daw in a state of much wonderment and considerable doubt.

The Commissioner had not been jesting with his friend, as he proved to Mr. Daw a few days later. He had a scheme to obtain the money required to

purchase the partnership, but it was beset with many difficulties. Mr. Alderwinkle, however, was not a man to abandon any pursuit which promised to put five hundred pounds into his pocket. He was indomitably persevering, and it is this quality in men which makes so many the winners in the race for wealth, even when matched against others who have been handicapped by fortune much more favourably. The heavier the ground the better for them, and especially when the obstacles are frequent and more or less formidable.

Nearly a month elapsed before Mr. Daw was in a position to inform Mr. Dalton that he was prepared to treat with him on his own terms for a share in the business in Bedford Row, and he was quite in earnest.

It was the end of March before the Clendons returned to England, and found themselves in furnished lodgings in Wimpole Street, making daily pilgrimages to the western suburbs in search of that darling little house with a small garden at the back, which they had so often pictured to each other as their future home and the abode of loves and doves and all the graces.

They were difficult to please, but at last elected to take a small villa at St. John's Wood, which they proceeded to furnish. The young housekeepers had, like many others, made a hundred calculations as to the probable cost of furnishing, and, like many others also, were astonished to find what numerous necessary things they had forgotten, and what a

serious excess of expenditure there was over estimates. They had not been very extravagant when on the Continent, but both silently reproached themselves for indulgence in many little acts of wastefulness which might otherwise have been represented by some enduring contribution to their future comfort. But they were only self-reproaches, as neither could have said one word which would have given pain to the other.

Settled at last, Percy began to consider the future, and to calculate how he was to provide for his household. Hitherto he had been drawing upon his small patrimony, contenting himself with the belief that when the time came for exertion something would turn up, but when he began to consider seriously what course of industry he should pursue, he was startled to find how few doors were open to a man without a profession. He had always put away any earnest consideration of this subject, and now he was, as we have said, startled at the tremendous barrier before him.

The army? — His means were not adequate to the requirements of that profession. Literature? — that fatal will-o'-the-wisp to many a hopeful man — he tried it, and his heart grew sick with failure and delay. Commerce? — He knew no one who could give him an introduction to any of its professors, and what would his position have been had he had interest? A clerkship.

Whichever way he looked, he saw the tremendous barrier opposed to him. What could he do? There was daily a growing necessity that this ques-

tion should be solved, as a new and holy claim on his exertion was about to be added. What could he do? He began to search the newspapers daily, and to answer advertisements addressed to persons with a small capital, and who were promised great returns and easy or gentlemanly employment. They proved to be from struggling tradesmen or clever fellows desirous to establish loan societies; and who had abundance of brains and first-rate connections, but lacking the one thing necessary for persons anxious to borrow money — money to lend. Of course such associations were rejected.

There came a gleam of light at last. An advertisement appeared addressed to "Gentlemen of education desirous of employment and who can find security. Hours of business from ten till four. Apply in the first instance, stating capabilities, to X. Y., Garraway's."

Percy wrote instantly. In what anxiety did he pass the hours which followed the posting of that letter and the receipt of the reply! One came appointing a meeting for the next day at an office in the City. Percy could scarcely sleep! He busied himself with speculations as to the nature of the employment about to be offered to him, and resolved to accept anything which a gentleman ought not to reject.

With a beating heart Percy took his way to the City, and after some inquiry found himself at the door of a newly-painted office in Size Lane. There was no inscription on the door-posts, but there were the painter's indications that one was about to be

placed there. Percy entered the house, and, in accordance with the instructions in the letter he had received, inquired for Mr. Jackson, the manager, of a young man whom he found at a desk in the outer office. After a few moments' absence the young man returned, and then desired Mr. Clendon to go into an inner room, where two gentlemen were seated with many piles of paper before them, and apparently deeply engaged in calculations, which they suspended reluctantly to receive their visitor.

"Mr. Clendon!" exclaimed one. "This really is an unexpected pleasure! I had no idea that you was the gent who had replied to our advertisement? Mr. Jackson, Mr. Clendon."

Mr. Jackson looked the impersonation of respectability and commercial probity, so admirably was he got up. After expressing his gratification that Mr. Clendon and Mr. Alderwinkle were known to each other, he remembered an engagement with Bungalow Brothers, and left his coadjutor to confer with Mr. Clendon.

"If I remember rightly," said Clendon, delighted at being known, "we were introduced to each other at Boulogne."

"Quite right, sir, by my sister, Mrs. Craven."

"I thought I was right," replied Percy. "I hope Mrs. Craven is well."

"She never is well," said the Commissioner; "but she is no worse than usual, I'm glad to say."

"And Mr. Craven?"

"Hooked it at Naples," replied the Commissioner.

"Went off with some Italian complaint. Dead and buried before we heard a word of the matter."

"Poor fellow!" said Percy. "He seemed likely to have lived for years when at Boulogne."

"Yes — he did. He was one of your gristly birds — tough as whit' leather. But he's gone, and so let us wish him *sealo guys*, as the undertakers say. And now to business."

"If you please, sir."

The bubble companies mania was just beginning to develope itself, and our friend Mr. Alderwinkle was instantly inoculated; it took, as the doctors say, remarkably well, and rendered him proof to any compunctions of conscience as to the ruin he was likely to sow broadcast.

The company about to be launched was promising enough — we forget its name — and of course Percy was to be secretary, with four hundred pounds a year, and other advantages, and all that he was to do in return — at least, just at present — was to place at the embryo company's bankers eight hundred pounds, taking Mr. Jackson's note of hand for the amount, to be *recouped* out of the first payment of calls, holding as a collateral security the seal of the company, and a bill of sale on the office furniture.

Mr. Alderwinkle had advanced *five hundred pounds* on similar security — at least, he said he had.

Percy pleaded his want of capacity as a man of business, to excuse his dulness in understanding all the advantages of the new company, and Mr. Alderwinkle might have failed to enlighten him, had not

Mr. Jackson fortunately returned, and by a more lucid description, made it clear to the victim that he could lose nothing, by any possibility, with such security, and that he would undoubtedly earn four hundred a year.

Full of this pleasant anticipation, Percy returned homewards, having pledged himself to divulge none of the confidences made to him, except to his wife.

After dinner, Percy, sitting by Jessie, then reclining on the sofa, repeated all the glowing descriptions of independence, if not of certain wealth, which he had listened to in the morning, and that wise woman of the world became so elated at the golden harvest in the future that she nearly cried herself into hysterics.

It would be useless to describe the progress of this bubble from its blowing to its bursting; for burst it did, but not until Percy had received a quarter's salary out of his own money, the balance vanishing with Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Alderwinkle was loud in his denunciations of the levanting manager, and vowed, in language not to be repeated, that he had lost over five hundred pounds, which no one believed except the almost ruined Percy Clendon.

Matters began to look very serious with the Clendons. Percy's diminished patrimony must be exhausted in another year, and then what would become of Jessie and the little innocent who had come to have her part with them. Something must be done — but what? God alone could help him.

In his despair he wrote to Mr. Dalton, confessing

the error he had committed, and imploring pardon, if not for himself, at least for Jessie, whose weakness he had abused, by leading her to the commission of the wrong which had justly incensed her father. His letter was returned unanswered; but his anxiety for the future of his wife and child was soon to end, although for a time he knew it not.

The ruin Mr. Dalton had foreseen, as sure to overtake Percy Clendon, had come, and the anger of the outraged father was appeased. Jessie had learned the truth, and with that conviction came her forgiveness. It came too late, however, to bring much comfort, as Mr. Dalton had a renewal of his former attack, and his mind gradually darkened, but not until he had embraced Jessie and forgiven her her trespass, and after a time, at her earnest pleading, her husband also.

When Mr. Dalton died, his will showed how deeply Percy had offended, how greatly he had been mistrusted. Mr. Dalton had bequeathed all his property to his daughter for her life, with remainder to her children, Jessie's interest to cease should she mortgage it in any way, and the bequest was accompanied by this strong addendum:

"If my daughter accept this bequest she must consider that she does so with the conditions I have specified, and that if she by any subterfuge depart from the spirit of them, I trust that the money will bring no comfort to herself or to her children."

Mr. Dalton's executors fully comprehended the meaning of those words; and out of consideration to

Percy, they passed them over when the will was read.

Mr. Dalton left Jessie eighteen thousand pounds, and a few trifling legacies to others. By a codicil, he made the payment for the moiety of his practice easy to Mr. Daw, who now seemed more than ever destined to become rich.

Percy had now no fear for Jessie and his child — it was only for himself, as the bread-winner for his household, that he had to care; and his patrimony was reduced to little more than 500*l*.

He must to work, as he could not endure to know that the roof which covered him, the bread which he ate, the clothes which covered his body, were purchased with money which he had not earned, and which was withheld from him by the man who had gathered it, even when his hands could hold it no longer.

The dread of dependence became day by day more intolerable, and yet, as before, there was the terrible barrier which could not be passed. Plenty, even luxury, was about him; but there sat the "skeleton at the feast," and turned the daintiest morsels into ashes.

Despondency, known at times perhaps to all, frequently oppressed him, but with manly courage he concealed it from his wife, and she alone of all his small circle of intimates never suspected that Percy Clendon had a sorrow.

There was one friend to whom Percy had often turned in thought, and from whom he knew he

should still have received sympathy, if not wise counsel. But he and Mildred Deering had been long estranged, and he felt that to have attempted a renewal of their former intimacy would be to sanction, as it were, the wrong done to his wife.

Mildred also had often regretted the loss of her old friend, her more than brother, and when she remembered the cause of their separation her resentment against Jessie became intense and unforgiving.

Mildred had remained at the Vicarage some time after her father's death, and until the sale of the old place was about to commence, and then, by her guardian Mr. Dalton's advice, she came to London, attended only by Mrs. Coppice and her husband, firmly refusing to make her home in Bedford Row. The reason which she gave to Mr. Dalton for this determination was the state of her health, which would make her more troublesome as a visitor than she cared to be, added to her desire to reside in the immediate neighbourhood of an eminent physician from whom she professed to believe she might derive some amelioration of her recurrent suffering. Mr. Dalton was obliged unwillingly to admit the reasonableness of Mildred's objection. And when Jessie's misconduct had filled his heart with sorrow, he fancied he better understood the true cause of Mildred's refusal.

Mildred's first great trial had been from the conduct of her mother. Regarding her father's memory almost with idolatry, Mildred, when possessed with the knowledge of her mother's unwifely conduct in

continuing a correspondence with her former lover and assisting him with money obtained from her husband, refused to hold communion with her, and even went so far as to write to her a letter filled with bitter reproaches and remonstrance.

To this letter Mrs. Deering had replied:

“Your letter does not surprise me. Long before you knew anything to my disadvantage, Mr. Deering, the man you so extol and admire had, by his utter forgetfulness of what was due to me as his wife, taught you to regard me only as a tolerated encumbrance, an obedient servant where I should have been mistress, a convenient slave when I should have been acknowledged as your mother. Do you think I have borne all this contempt and wrong for years past and not felt the injustice, the positive tyranny exercised upon me? What were money, house, and servants to me, knowing that I had no share in any one’s love, or sympathy, or consideration? Is it strange that I should have remembered the time when I was indeed a servant, but mistress of my own will, and free to escape from insult and cruelty? I did think of that time day by day, and of the man I had disgracefully deserted for wealth and station, though I knew he loved me tenderly, and that but for the mis-carriage of a letter, would have made me his wife — not in name only, but with all the loving privileges which that word implies.

“I heard by accident that he was in England, and all my love for him returned. He wrote to me, but I would not see him, because I would not trust

myself, knowing how keenly I felt my injuries from your father, and whom I might have sacrificed but for you. I did look forward to be released some day from my bondage, and I have not hesitated to promise the man who had continued to love me to make what amends I could to him when I was free. Remember — I have neither husband nor child, and by the time this reaches you I shall have left England to keep my promise."

There was much to distress Mildred in this letter. She knew there was truth in what her mother had written as to her treatment by father and daughter. She could not excuse, however, the clandestine correspondence maintained between her mother and Knight, believing that she herself could have borne any amount of suffering for the sake of that dear father who had only erred from thoughtlessness and never from intention. There was, also, much mortification of Mildred's pride in the knowledge that her mother, — nothing could destroy that relation between them, — that her mother had stooped so low as to marry a carpenter. There was one drop of comfort, however, — sixteen thousand miles or more would be between her and her mechanical stepfather.

Mildred's life was very lonely and monotonous. She could walk but little — usually in Kensington Gardens — and lovely as are our parks, the drives became after a time somewhat unexhilarating. The Deerings, like most people who have started out from their original social position, had very limited family

connexions whom they recognised, and their friends were all in the neighbourhood of Hartsden.

The Barnards had never been reconciled, not even after the death of Mr. Barnard, who, to use a vulgarism, had not "cut up" so well as had been expected, having sacrificed too much to appearance during his lifetime. It was also suspected that he had been induced to spend money in prosecuting his conjectural claim to the dormant baronetcy, a subject he never dared to mention to his more prudent wife. The politic Mrs. Barnard had indeed once thought of looking up her niece Mildred, the heiress, with a view to the interests of Oswald, who had succeeded to his father's business. That young cub, however, had long renounced his mother's control, and was devoting himself so earnestly to proving the qualities of his own stock-in-trade, — as his father had expressed his apprehension that he would do when we first met him, — that he was rarely in a condition for home consultation, being tipsy at night and feverishly irritable in the morning. He had flatly refused "to marry the Queen of Sheba," — why he selected that potentate, we know not, — when his mother had ventured to sound him upon his notions of the future. Perhaps he had none at that time.

Mildred was very lonely. When the weather was unfavourable for going out, she endeavoured to amuse herself by reading, or drawing, or needlework. But there were times when these resources failed her — when her infirmity made her restless and excitable. In this state she would often refer

to a diary she had kept when at the Old Place, and what she read there, if it did not excite her more, would send her into deep thought — thought that lasted for an hour or more, and which often brought forth tears.

No doubt brother Percy's name had been frequently inscribed in that old diary, and with it might have been associated some of the day-dreams of her girlhood.

Perhaps what she had read had been of a time when she had thought that Percy and herself would never be all apart, or that their joys and sorrows would be shared as their childish griefs and pleasures had been for so many years. Perhaps she thought, now she knew what was meant by woman's love, that it might not have lain wasting in her heart, but having found its counterpart in his, have become the happiness of her life, as it was now its sharpest sorrow.

The lonely hours, not always ending with the night, but surely beginning with the morning, might have been employed in wifely duties which would have gained his praises, and made her life more enviable than a queen's — but for one!

That one was Jessie Dalton, the false friend, the dissembler, the cruel daughter; there was no doubt of it. Mildred had considered this in such a manner, aye, day by day, that she had lost all Christian charity for her aggressor, and would feel revenged if she could strike her without injuring Percy.

There seemed to be little chance of such a con-

summation after Mr. Dalton died and left Jessie a rich woman. Abundance, the man she loved, health, and her mother's blessing at her knee, — who could hope to cast a shadow over her life!

CHAPTER XVI.

WITHOUT any definite object, Percy, during one of his dark days, took his blue devils into the City. As he walked along, he envied the busy men he met, or who passed him by — many no doubt carrying heavy burthens out of sight — when, by good or evil fortune, he met the Commissioner looking, as he declared he felt, “fresh as paint.”

“But what’s the matter with you, Mr. Clendon? You seem out of sorts.”

“Well, I am out of sorts, as you say,” replied Percy, compelled by the easy confidence of his old director to answer him, although the sight of him was rather provocative of resentment.

“I thought all was colour *de rose* with you, now that old Dalton had made your seat easy, and that you was an idle man for the rest of your days.”

“It is because I do not care to be an idle man, that I am out of sorts,” replied Percy.

“Soon remedy that!” said the Commissioner. “A man with money can choose his own work. What’s your taste?”

“Certainly not a company,” replied Percy.

“I should think not,” said the Commissioner, coolly. “You and me have had enough of them sorts of dodges, I fancy. Something might be done with bills; plenty of good paper to be had.”

Percy declared — for reasons he did not explain — that he did not care to touch bills.

“No — very well — something more active? Early 'bus sort of thing! I know — an eye to the Lord Mayor's coach. In at nine, out at five, and — yes, by Jove! — I know of something that is positively stunning.”

Percy mistrusted the man. Despite all the Commissioner had said about his own losses, Percy could not free himself of the idea but that he had gained by the swindle which had made his dupe nearly a thousand pounds poorer. So beaten was Percy, however, that he could not but listen to what Mr. Alderwinkle had to propose.

The Commissioner made his communication with great reserve and circumspection. He knew a party, he said — a party who stood as high as any man in the City — head of a first-rate concern — who had told him in confidence, that if he knew of a respectable party with a small capital — say five thousand — he, the first party, was disposed to ease himself at the collar, and take the other party as partner!

“Five thousand pounds!” muttered Percy.

“Yes, that's all. I'll be bound you'd clear it in a couple of year. When I tell you — in strict confidence, mind — that it's wines, imported direct from the growers — no Hambro' and other make-ups — but W-I-N-E, wine, and been established this fifty year, you'll believe what I say.”

Percy thought it was strange that “a party” of such position should have to negotiate through the Commissioner, and delicately hinted as much.

"You don't know me yet, Mr. Clendon," said the Commissioner, not in the least offended. "I come into contact with all the divisions of the Post Office Directory. Now this party is one of my swells, you see."

Percy confessed to imperfect vision.

"Why, I deal in a good many articles — on commission; and the party to which I refer is a good customer in one direction — though at the head of a firm 'stablished fifty years, there's no starch about him. He's not one of your stuck-up fellows, whose back would break if you took off their accommodation bills; and so we *do* now and then smoke our *sheroot*, and imbibe together, and that's how the matter come about. He was leaky and I pumped, it being my business to do so, or how would people be brought together?"

"May I ask your friend's name?" said Percy. He would have been puzzled to have given a reason for asking the question.

"My principal?" replied the Commissioner. "Well, for the present that must remain dark, Mr. Clendon;" adding abruptly, "do you see your way to the needful?"

Percy at once acknowledged that he did not.

"That's strange!" remarked the Commissioner, evidently surprised; "and only five thousand! Why, I did hear that old Dalton cut up for over twenty thousand pounds, and left you the whole on it."

"He left his money to Mrs. Clendon, not to me," replied Percy, colouring slightly.

"Well, that does make a difference, certain-ly,"

observed the Commissioner, thoughtfully. "Such a will as that I consider clean against the Marriage Service. 'All worldly goods' should include legacies." He paused for a moment or two, and then added, "But I don't see that even that's a closer."

"I don't understand you," said Clendon.

"Why, Mrs. C. might lend you the money."

"Impossible. She has not the power," said Percy, again colouring.

"Oh, the thing's to be done somehow!" replied Mr. Alderwinkle. "Where there's the will there's a way. She might come in as collateral security" (he was very partial to that phrase). "Just talk it over with her; there's no hurry, as my party's on to another game just at present. My eye! there'll be a row when that sees daylight."

Mr. Alderwinkle then recollected a pressing appointment; and having given Percy his business card, walked away rapidly, as though his assertion as to the appointment had really been true.

Percy did think over what had been said, as he went homewards — thought over it for many days, until he began to regard it as a possible means of escape from the misery of dependence.

The game which was occupying Mr. Alderwinkle's party was of a delicate nature, and too important to be at once disclosed even to you, good reader.

Oswald Barnard had fulfilled the promise of his youth. The over-indulged boy, had, as a natural consequence, repaid his mother's fondness with dis-

respect, contumely, and ingratitude, and bitter were the tears shed by the weak, strong-loving woman.

She was compelled to be a silent spectator of his vices, and to witness, without daring to reprove, his self destruction of mind and body. Like most men of his habits, he was averse to the society of reputable women, being seemingly insensible to all those gentle influences which belong to them alone. He was a great man at Richmond and Greenwich dinners, and his office in the City was a kind of free "luncheon bar" to the fast fellows of the locality. With that set, and it included men whose age should have brought discretion, he was of course popular. There was one man about fifty (he was in the fancy way, and called Jollifier — his proper name being Jowley) who was the life of the party. His iron-grey hair was cut close to his head, as were his whiskers to his fresh, healthy-looking face. He was strictly commercial in his dress, and it sounded strangely to hear such a staid, respectable-looking man utter jests only worthy of a mountebank. He was a great ally of Oswald Barnard, who one day accepted Jollifier's invitation to a little dinner at Greenwich. Oswald was rather annoyed when he found that the party included two ladies, who were introduced as Mr. Jollifier's sister and niece, the only other guest being an elderly City man, known to Oswald as head clerk in one of the banks.

Oswald was unmistakably much embarrassed at first; but Mrs. Greystock, Jollifier's sister, was evidently a woman of tact, which she displayed by putting her brother's guest so much at his ease, that

before the dinner was half over he became conversational (for him), and even went so far as to take wine with both the ladies; that custom not being abrogated in the circle in which Mr. Barnard moved.

The younger lady's name was Flora. She was seemingly about two- or three-and-twenty — certainly not older. Her features were regular — almost statuesque — but were capable of varied expression, which carried conviction that she was no pretty doll, possessing neither mind nor character. She was rather reserved in her manner, and showed more indications than any other of the party of having mixed in good society. On the fourth finger of her left hand she wore a cluster of rings, and those who looked closely would have discovered one of plain gold. Yet she was always addressed as Flora.

Nothing could be more decorous or more agreeable than the whole proceeding, and Oswald felt — really felt, for the first time in his life, perhaps — a respect for the ladies who were his companions.

The men sat but a short time over their wine when the ladies had retired, and rejoined them immediately that coffee was announced.

"Now this is really very good of you," said Mrs. Greystock, motioning Oswald to a seat beside her on the sofa, "coming like good boys. One has heard such dreadful accounts of these Greenwich dinners."

"Utter misrepresentations!" replied Jollifier. "Irregularities have occurred when Her Majesty's Ministers, the Bench of Bishops, and Friends of the Clergy have dined here together. But ask Oswald

Barnard if he ever saw anything wrong; and he's an authority."

Mrs. Greystock made the appeal, and Oswald had the hardihood to confirm Mr. Jollifier's statement.

The amphitriton retired to pay the bill, and the old bank clerk engaged in quiet talk with Flora, whilst Mrs. Greystock was evidently doing the agreeable to the utmost with Oswald. She had just said, "Now you promise to call to-morrow — say at two — No — I'll take no refusal," as Jollifier re-entered the room and was informed that Mr. Barnard would bring him on the following day to luncheon.

A cloud passed over Flora's face, and there was anger in her eyes as she looked towards her mother.

The carriages were announced, and the dinner at Greenwich was at an end, Mr. Oswald Barnard leaving the house, to the utter astonishment of the waiters, as sober as a gentleman.

Mrs. Greystock lived in furnished lodgings in Mortimer Street. When at breakfast the next morning, Flora said:

"Mama, why did uncle invite us to Greenwich yesterday?"

"Why, dear? To give us a little change — a little pleasure, of course; and heaven knows we have little enough of either."

Flora made no reply, but trifled with her teaspoon.

"Why did you ask that question?" said her mama.

"Because he has not taken much notice of us for some time — and you went to him in the City — he did not call here."

"Oh, he's such a busy man — all City men are now-a-days," replied Mrs. Greystock.

Flora was again silent and occupied as before.

After a while, she said:

"And, mama, why did you ask Mr. Barnard here to lunch to-day? Our luncheon is bread-and-butter."

"You are strangely captious this morning," replied Mrs. Greystock. "I should have thought your pleasant evening might have made you more amiable."

"True — but you don't answer my question," said Flora, looking earnestly in her mother's face, which, despite the inspection, showed no sign of confusion as she replied:

"To please your uncle, my dear. He has a great regard for Mr. Barnard, and tells me he is — he is unhappy at home, and would be the better for more society — good society."

"Do you think we are in a position to entertain such visitors?" asked Flora, calmly.

"What; to a bit of luncheon? Certainly! It is good policy to oblige your uncle, even at some trifling inconvenience," replied Mrs. Greystock, rising. "I am going to Fortnum and Mason's, if you like to walk with me."

Flora begged to be excused, as she had some slipper-work to complete, and which should have been done yesterday. She had great skill in worsted

working, and made a profit of it in partially completing patterns of slippers, which more opulent young ladies finished and presented as their own handiwork to confiding cousins, brothers, and pet parsons.

When Mrs. Greystock had gone on her hospitable mission, Flora sat down to her frame and commenced working; but as the bright flowers and green leaves grew out of the canvas, tears fell from the worker's eyes. Were her thoughts connecting themselves with the golden symbol on her finger, and recalling the memory of a dead or faithless husband, or of one living, loving, and absent? She rose up, pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and having walked a few paces about the room, sat down again to create green leaves and bright flowers.

Mrs. Greystock was evidently an experienced housekeeper, as she proved when the servant brought up from the cab the good things which had been selected for Mr. Jowley's and Mr. Barnard's delectation.

Flora had hidden away all trace of her sorrow from her face when her mother's guests arrived, and by the effort she made to prevent its return, became, to Mrs. Greystock's surprise and satisfaction, more than usually animated and agreeable.

Mr. Barnard had selected a subject of conversation with which he was fairly well acquainted, and was eloquent in praise of the Surrey Union and the glorious runs over Purley Downs. Uncle Jowley was astonished to hear Flora speak of the chase with an enthusiasm quite equal to Barnard's; and when she narrated a Buckinghamshire experience of her

own, he was delighted to see that the face of his young friend was beaming with admiration. Where were her tears, her memories, then?

The luncheon ended, Mr. Jowley said, addressing Mrs. Greystock, —

“And now, Janet, I have promised to be — what shall I say — an interceder for my friend Oswald. He wants you and Flora and me and old Borbury to repeat our experience of yesterday, and dine with him any day convenient to you at the Star and Garter at Richmond.”

“Dear me! that is very kind of Mr. Barnard. I really don’t know what to say,” replied Mrs. Greystock, looking towards Flora. She should have known what to answer had she been able, or rather willing, to understand the darkened face of her daughter.

Oswald begged that no denial would be given; and Mr. Jowley repeated his request so much like a command, that Mrs. Greystock accepted the invitation and named a day.

When the guests were gone, Mrs. Greystock made some trifling remark, and was about to leave the room, when Flora said —

“Don’t go, mama; I want to speak to you.”

“What is it, my dear?”

“Sit down, if you please.” Mrs. Greystock did as she was bidden. “What is the meaning of all this?”

“Of what, child?”

“Of my uncle’s sudden notice of us — bringing

this man, Mr. Barnard, here, and again making up a party. What does it mean?"

"Pon my word, Flora, you are very trying — very," replied Mrs. Greystock, tying her capstrings energetically. "My brother is, after a long coolness, evidently desirous of being upon terms again, and you appear to be resolved to put an ill construction upon what he does."

"Because I remember five years ago what he compelled you to do —"

"Compelled me? No, Flora; I acted as I thought best."

"I will never believe that you acted from yourself alone — that you were not influenced by others. Oh, mama! do not let me believe it." Flora covered her face to hide her tears.

"What did I do?"

"Sold me!"

"I won't listen to such nonsense!" said Mrs. Greystock, rising. "You ought to have more respect for the memory of your dead husband than talk so."

"My husband! He was not my husband; he bought me. I was no more his wife, in the true meaning of a wife, than any man's mistress. My uncle — and, if it must be said, you also — O God! I must have been mad to have yielded."

"You are mad now, Flora. What has excited you so?"

"The suspicion — the suspicion that —"

"Mr. Barnard is about to make you an offer? He's not such a fool as to marry an officer's widow with a fifty pound pension. Not that — as your pension goes if you marry."

"Then you are not devising —"

"Devising? Pray remember that I am your mother. Devising means scheming — plotting. I should have thought the suffering — the poverty which we have known together might have endeared me to you —"

"Oh, don't! Don't speak any more!" cried Flora, throwing her arms around her mother's neck, and sobbing violently.

Mrs. Greystock and her brother were plotting nevertheless. The sister had long been dependant on the brother; and it was to free himself that jolly Mr. Jowley had suggested that his unhappy niece should again be offered up on the domestic altar. Mrs. Greystock had married without love — married, as she had thought, for money. But her speculative husband died insolvent, and she was a creditor for all her expectations. She and her brother had forced — by cruel taunts, by constant bickerings — her daughter to marry a debauchee, because he was reported to be rich. But Major Allcroft quarrelled with his fair bargain, died, and left his precious money to a strange woman.

The game of matrimony was to be played again; and, many as the chances were against the old players, they did not despair of success. Brother and

sister leagued together. Mr. Jowley was insulted, ill-used by the rejection of such a man and such a match. Old claims for money lent were brought forward. Seizure, ruin, culminated about the unhappy mother. Old stage tricks, perhaps you will say; but when they make part of man or woman's real life, they are terrible to encounter. Flora's was a dead heart. She had yielded once, hating herself always for her weakness; yet she yielded again, and became the wretchedest thing almost a woman can become — the unloving wife of Oswald Barnard.

Mr. Alderwinkle was right when he predicted that a row would certainly follow the completion of Mr. Barnard's "game." Mrs. Barnard, *mère*, was not in the least informed as to what was going on, and had been led — poor fond woman — into a belief that Oswald was reforming. It was not until the night before his marriage — on his return from his last bachelor's party — that he informed his mother he had found some one superior to the "Queen of Sheba," and was almost as good as a married man. He had kept his mother in ignorance of his intentions simply, as he had said, to avoid "a row (we omit an adjective) as he knew she'd not let him marry peaceably a girl without money." He would have done injustice to his mother's teaching had he thought otherwise; and her reproaches, when informed of what was about to take place, came with terrible bitterness. What would they have been had she known that he was not only to marry a

penniless adventuress, but had settled upon her the reversion, at his mother's death, of the only freehold property which his poor, dear father had left unencumbered. Oswald snapped his fingers at his enraged mother, who had indulged him in all his fancies, to his destruction, and declared that if they were to be friends again, it must be when she had apologised.

It was not long before Mrs. Barnard brought herself to humble herself, and seek for reconciliation with her son. Her manner, when introduced to Flora, plainly showed that if she had forgiven Oswald, she intended to have her revenge on the promoter of his disobedience.

Oswald had business which compelled him to leave the two ladies together, and Mrs. Barnard, *mère*, improved the occasion.

"Now we are alone, Mrs. Barnard," she said, "I wish to unburthen my mind as regards yourself and your manœuvring mama!"

"I beg that you will not be violent, ma'am."

"Not violent? who's going to be violent?" said *la mère*, colouring crimson, "but I am not to have my son inveigled away from me without expressing my indignation."

"Well, I suppose I must listen."

"If you please. I consider that no decent woman — especially a mother — would have encouraged a young man to form such a solemn engagement as marriage without consulting me. Why didn't you do it — you or your mother?"

"I really must refer you to Mr. Barnard," replied Flora.

"To be abused again as I have been already? No, I thank you, Mrs. Oswald," continued *la mère*, speaking very deliberately. "I have only one consolation in this matter; you will have earned the money he has settled upon you long before you die. He is a confirmed drunkard, ma'am. He's a violent, self-willed man, and will make you as miserable as he has done me! Oh, how I have indulged him from his youth up! How I have tried to get him respectably married, and couldn't! How he has deceived me! Deserted me in my old age, and left me to die in the night, for what he cares." Here Mrs. Barnard fairly broke down, and earnest, sincere tears came streaming like rain down her wrinkled cheeks.

Flora's woman-nature was touched. She placed her hand gently on the poor mother's shoulder, and finding herself not repulsed, ventured to kiss the mourner's forehead. *La mère* was subdued; she threw her arms round Flora's neck, and when she could speak said, or rather sobbed:

"Oh! Flora! Flora! be kind to that dear boy! Be indulgent to his only failing! He don't mean, I'm sure he don't mean to get intoxicated, but he does. You must break him of it; and let me come here whenever I like, and you come to me and bring Oswald with you, and your mama, and let me pass my declining years in peace."

Flora assented to each of these propositions, and much of her mother-in-law's after comfort came from the ministrations of an affectionate nature which had been cruelly abused.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE wooing of Oswald Barnard — or rather the subjugation of Flora Allcroft — occupied full three months, and during all that time Percy Clendon had not ventured to submit to his wife the proposal of the Commissioner, although constantly urged thereto by that speculative gentleman. Yet at times there seemed to be no reasonable objection to the scheme for raising the required capital. In two — or three years at most — the business, Mr. Alderwinkle was prepared to prove, would repay its purchase, and Percy had no occasion to apply his gains to any other purpose than the liquidation of his wife's advances, and the charges of his household. But a little quiet reflection destroyed this conviction, and he felt that he should be asking of his wife's affection that which the prudence of the donor of the money had expressly forbidden by the conditions of his will.

No other opening, much as Percy sought for one, presented itself to free him from a life of idleness and dependence. His own patrimony had all but dwindled away, and then — the thought almost crazed him!

This hesitation on the part of Percy rather disgusted the Commissioner, who had his own reasons

for urging on a conclusion to the business. His principal had become so fascinated by Mrs. Allcroft, that he had even mastered his habitual inebriety so far as to confine himself to an occasional debauch, and that not until he had paid his visit to Mortimer Street. He had actually talked of sticking closer to business, and had refused a dozen proposals for tavern dinners.

Mr. Alderwinkle therefore pressed Percy hard, and until he succeeded in getting him to write to Jessie the state of affairs, and to solicit her assistance in the manner proposed by the Commissioner.

Poor Jessie was almost in an ecstasy of alarm when she had read her husband's letter. He had gone out of town to await her answer. At first she thought of consulting her trustee, Mr. Daw, but knowing how bad an opinion Percy had of that person, she determined to judge for herself — to answer for herself.

Her letter in reply was a very long one. After making declaration of her love for Percy, and her devotion to him as his true wife, she entreated him to forego the thought of encountering again the risk and anxiety of business. She did not hesitate to point out his unfitness for such pursuits, and entreated him to be content with the competency they had — *they*, not she alone. With prudence and frugality, enough might be saved to dower their little daughter, the more so as the circle of their acquaintance was very small, and need not be enlarged. She had paused when she had written thus far, desiring to avoid any more painful reasons for

her rejection of his supplication; he had written so humbly as to make his letter read like a supplication. But a reperusal of his letter left her no option if this subject was not to be renewed between them. He had stated so strongly his determination to be an independent man, that all which she had written would, she felt, be only waste of words. She therefore continued reminding him that she was only the custodian of her father's property; that it had been bequeathed to her, and accepted by her with full understanding of the meaning of her father's words. She had disobeyed him once, and perhaps shortened his life by so doing — certainly she had deprived his declining years of all comfort — of all the peacefulness he had earned by incessant toil and self-sacrifice.

Could she again disobey him? Could she peril the interests of her child, so solemnly confided to her by the dying words of her father?

How often did Jessie read her letter — altering every word that sounded harshly or unkind — before she parted from it. When it was gone, she sat with her head resting between her closed hands, recalling sentence by sentence, and wondering how Percy would receive what she had written.

He could not have satisfied her. By turns he admitted the justice of her conclusions, or condemned the worldly-mindedness that could measure money against his peace, or resented her respect for her dead father, overtopping as it did a true wife's love for her husband.

Percy's honest nature triumphed at last; and when

he returned home and pressed his Jessie in his arms, he acquitted her of all unworthiness.

Not so, Mr. Alderwinkle.

"Well, Mr. Clendon," he said, when that gentleman acquainted him with the result of his negotiation, "you take this matter easier than I should. Man and wife, in my opinion, should be like a pair of post-horses. The man carries the weight, you know; and she's a bad bred 'un that won't stick to the collar when there's up-hill work to be done. I only wish you'd tried this jibber before, and so saved me loss of time and expenses."

"Perhaps five pounds will compensate you for both," said Percy, offering a note for that sum.

"Well," said the Commissioner, without a moment's hesitation, "I'll take it as a matter of business, you know; and I'm sorry the missus takes so much after the father. He was an arbitrary, close-fisted cove, he was! I should have my quarter's screw paid regularly if I was you, Mr. Clendon."

As Mr. Clendon made no reply to Mr. Alderwinkle, the latter gentleman had only to pocket his commission and take his leave.

This conversation often came back to Percy's recollection, and at times the simile of the post-horses appeared to have some truth in it.

Mr. Daw continued to be a thriving man. He was fortunate enough to retain nearly all Mr. Dalton's old clients, and to acquire new ones — Miss Deering among the number.

A strange intimacy was still maintained between

Mr. Daw and the Commissioner, and at times, no doubt, they had been of service to each other. Mr. Alderwinkle had kept his negotiation for the partnership from his friend Mr. Daw, not thinking perhaps that his agency would be required; but having failed in the negotiation with Mr. Clendon, the Commissioner thought that possibly among Mr. Daw's clients an "eligible party" might be found. Mr. Alderwinkle had therefore called in Bedford Row, and made a full communication of all that had taken place.

"And why didn't you name this business to *me* before, seeing that I am one of Mrs. Clendon's trustees?" asked Mr. Daw, naturally.

"Because my principal wishes the matter kept dark, and because ——"

"Of your commission, I suppose?" said Daw, sarcastically.

"Well, I knew you'd have to come in when the deeds were drawn," replied Alderwinkle. "Of course I knew that."

Well, Mr. Daw could call no one to mind at the moment, and in fact seemed rather annoyed at his coadjutor's reticence. He promised, however, to think over the matter.

Miss Deering's estrangement from Miss Dalton had commenced at the time of Percy Clendon's proposal to Mr. Dalton — Mr. Daw knew — and continued ever since, so that the clever young lawyer put his own construction upon it, and was not far from the truth.

As business took him now and then to Mildred's

house, he had once or twice ventured to speak of the Clendons, and on one occasion rather disparagingly of Percy, expressing surprise at his contentedness at being so entirely dependent upon his wife.

Miss Deering said nothing in justification of her old playmate and friend, and Mr. Daw concluded that she was not displeased to listen to the condemnation of one who had no doubt slighted her, and who therefore, according to "tale and history," was now regarded with aversion by the injured woman.

Charged with the information he had received from the Commissioner, Mr. Daw made some excuse to call upon Miss Deering, believing that by the communication he could make, he might ingratiate himself in some way with his client. He hardly knew why he desired to do this, except that he always liked to be on good terms with people who had plenty of money.

After talking of matters affecting Miss Deering's investments, Mr. Daw said —

"Oh, by the bye! a story has reached me which may amuse you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Mr. Clendon has been kicking over the traces, and had a little squabble with his wife."

Miss Deering bit her lips, and bowed.

"It seems that Mr. Percy has become tired, or ashamed of living on his wife's means."

"Quarrelling?" asked Miss Deering.

"I should say yes, or something very like it. It appears that he could have joined a first-rate house

in the city, wanting a partner. Five thousand pounds were required, and the concern, I believe, was well worth it."

Miss Deering remained silent.

"Naturally he applied to his wife to help him; as any man would have done."

"And did she refuse?" asked Miss Deering, hardly above a whisper.

"Trust Miss Jessie for that, my dear madam," replied Daw. "She has not been bred in a lawyer's drawing-room for nothing. She stood by the conditions of her father's will."

"Could she — could she, if so minded, have done what he asked of her?"

"Well, yes; I think she could. She could not have advanced him the money, that's tied up; but she could have helped him to raise it."

"And wouldn't?"

"No, ma'am, she refused to risk a shilling, I am told, and upbraided him for asking her to do so. That's not the sort of love that I should care to have shown me. Clendon, I hear, feels her conduct deeply, and so would any man;" and then Mr. Daw explained how he had become possessed of his information.

"I am sorry, of course, to hear what you say. But I believe it has been often remarked that unfilial daughters and false friends never make devoted wives," said Mildred, coldly.

Mr. Daw believed not, but as he had not read the axiom in any of the books at the office, he did not pursue the subject. He had taken his leave, and

was at the hall door, when the servant, who had answered a sharp summons of Miss Deering's bell, ran down-stairs to say:

"Mistress would be glad to see you again to-morrow morning."

Mr. Daw named an hour, wondering much as he walked to his office for what reason he had been desired to attend upon his client.

Mildred, or Miss Deering, as it will be occasionally convenient to call her, was greatly excited by the conversation which had passed between her and her lawyer, and it was some time before she could master her agitation sufficiently to think with any purpose.

"And has it come to this?" she thought. "Has he, with all his fine susceptibilities, his quick sense of all that was honourable and gentlemanly, been brought down to such a consciousness of dependence, that he bargains and makes known his distress to such men as Mr. Daw, and the low creature his go-between. Poor Percy! Poor Percy! How miserably wretched he must be!" Tears welled up from her heart into her eyes, and her love once more confessed itself.

"And she has refused to help him! I knew she could not love him as I did. She *knew* I loved him, though he was in part the cause of my suffering; the loss of all that my youth promised once to be. She knew there could be no other in all the world likely to forget what I had become, and yet she took him from me. Cruel, wicked creature!" Mildred's anger was visible in her face — that face usually

so calm, so resigned. She rose up, and looking in the glass, questioned the reflection of herself, half aloud.

— “Why has she refused him? Would *you* have denied him all you possessed? If he had reflected he must have seen her selfish nature even in accepting him, knowing as he should have done that I — No! No! I am spared that mortification. He did not suspect that I loved him, other than as a sister. Dear, dear brother Percy.”

She sat down again, and once more tears came to her relief, and after a few minutes she thought on in silence. “She will not set him free. She has not the generosity to do that, or perhaps the knowledge of her wrong to me makes her fear that her hold upon him may be loosened. So long as he is dependent upon her he must move, think, as she directs. No, Percy! though she has separated us in one way, we can never be disunited.”

Her thoughts then went to the consideration of the way in which Percy's emancipation could be effected without compromising herself, and after long consideration there appeared but one way — to place confidence in Mr. Daw.

From allusions which he had made when speaking of the Clendons, Mildred concluded that he suspected in part the reason for her estrangement from her old friends, but her woman's pride revolted from allowing him to know the whole truth, and that she still loved the man who had taken another as his wife. She had therefore to study a part and act it.

Punctual to the moment next morning Mr. Daw

arrived, and after the customary formalities, settled himself down to give his best attention to his client. Miss Deering was perfectly calm and composed, as though the business of the morning was one of a perfectly ordinary character.

"Mr. Daw," she said, "I believe it is perfectly understood in your profession, and acted upon, that the secrets of clients are held sacred by their legal advisers, even when they are of a questionable character."

"Perfectly, perfectly," replied Mr. Daw. "We are in fact a sort of lay father confessors, and —"

"Exactly," said Miss Deering, "and I am now about to confide in you, sir. You will not, if you please, question me as to my motives, should I elect to assign none."

"Certainly not, madam."

"Very well. I have been thinking, Mr. Daw, that some of my money might be invested at better interest than it is at present, or than as you proposed yesterday."

Mr. Daw intimated that he was listening.

"And I have been considering an idea which struck me yesterday when you spoke of Mr. Clendon's want of money. I suppose he would be prepared to pay good interest for the advance he requires?"

"He has no security, my dear lady!" exclaimed Mr. Daw, utterly astonished at what he had heard.

"I presume not," replied Miss Deering, composedly, "I presume not, or he would have no difficulty in finding a lender. What would he pay?"

"Pay, ma'am, pay! I should say anything," said Daw.

"Say ten per cent."

"But there's no security! I really cannot advise you —"

"I do not ask you, I am content to act upon my own opinion. You must lend this money in your name."

"My name, ma'am! I dare not — I dare not. If it were known I should lose my professional reputation for sagacity — for common prudence."

"Who was the man you spoke of? the man who applied to Mr. Clendon? He can't stand in the same danger of losing reputation."

"What, Mr. Alderwinkle? Well, perhaps — but really I feel bound — professionally bound, to entreat you not to commit this — well, there is no other word for it — this folly."

"How do you know that it is folly? People spend money upon hobbies — dress, building, planting, parties, gaming — why should I not ride mine, if I have one?"

"Really you ladies are extraordinary creatures, and not to be regulated by common sense or common reason!" said Mr. Daw, carried away by his professional feelings. "If, as I suspect, this desperate act proceeds —" he paused, fearing he might offend his rich client.

"If, as you suspect? I fancy I can explain for you. You suspect that at one time Mr. Clendon was a lover of mine, and that, despite his change of opinion, I am still woman enough to care for him."

"Well, really, yes, that is something like the conclusion at which I have arrived," replied Mr. Daw.

"Mr. Clendon never was a lover of mine. I fancy that gentlemen of your profession are not always well versed in the laws of the heart," replied Miss Deering, with a slight smile. "We women are extraordinary creatures, as you say. We love and we hate, and I am no exception to my sex."

"If your remarks apply to Mr. Clendon, you are taking a most extraordinary way of showing your hatred," said Mr. Daw.

"You think so? I have known Mr. Clendon many years. I know him to be strictly honourable, truthful."

"I should have expected a different opinion from you," said Mr. Daw, softly.

"Because you have misunderstood the — no matter. I believe him to be what I have said. My money will therefore be safe in his hands, my interest larger —"

"If he be successful."

"Yes, if he be successful."

"But if he fail. If he tire of this business as he has of others, you will lose your money," said Daw, impressively.

"But I shall obtain my money's worth — I shall be Mr. Clendon's creditor," replied Miss Deering, rising up. "That will be something: I shall hold Mr. Clendon in my power as his wife does now. I shall hit them both; I shall touch her through her pocket, touch him through his pride. You now un-

derstand why I desire this investment, which must not be known to come from me at present."

"Well, I have done my duty professionally," said Mr. Daw, throwing himself back despairingly in his chair; "I can't see how the money's to be advanced without exciting Clendon's inquiry."

"O yes, you will to-morrow, Mr. Daw," said Miss Deering, smiling encouragingly. "It is in cases of difficulty like this that your cleverness develops itself, and earns a proportionate reward. I don't ask you to belie yourself, but I have heard of 'legal fictions' — I believe there are such things to be purchased?"

"Really, Miss Deering, you put the matter very plainly," said Daw, with a pleasant chuckle. "I will turn the subject over, and, if you are determined to complete, in a day or two I will let you hear from me or see me."

"Thank you — you did not think me so spiteful, Mr. Daw — but there are some wounds which never close. And you will not consider expense in this matter."

Mr. Daw promised that he would not; and kept his word. As he walked along he felt rather pleased with the morning's business. Why? He had never liked Percy, and here was evidently a piece of luck in store for him. He had always been snubbed by Jessie, and she could hardly be injured by the failure, and would be benefited by the success of her husband. Why was he pleased then? He had gained a great confidence from the rich Miss Deering, and he had learned also that, however she may have

regarded Percy Clendon, she now hated him heartily. Only Mr. Daw knew wherefore those reflections gave him pleasure. He set them forth later in the day in a small pocket ledger, in which were memoranda of cases and of certain matters he wished to remember, and which would have been out of place altogether in the Office Diary.

Mr. Alderwinkle was summoned to a conference at Mr. Daw's lodging in the Strand. Mr. Daw did not care to occupy rooms over his office; as, by the will of Mr. Dalton, Miss Pragmore was to remain in possession of so much of the upper part of the house, rent free, as she should elect to take. She consequently made selection of all the best chambers, and insisted upon having the keys of the offices left with her every night, in order to satisfy herself that the gas had been properly turned off. Miss Pragmore was a strong-minded maiden, and had no fear of thieves. She had once dragged a marauder who had sought concealment up the kitchen chimney, forth by the legs, and had then clung to him with so much determination that she presented a favourable impersonation of an "Aunt Sally."

Yet it was not very cheery for her domestics to be lectured every night before going to bed on the danger of gas explosions, illustrated by numerous accidents, of which Miss Pragmore evidently kept a record, — but they were. The domestics always remained in the hall passage whilst their intrepid mistress made a sort of Guy Fawkes examination of

the offices, sniffing about for evidence of danger, like a terrier in pursuit of a rat; and whilst thus engaged one evening her foot struck against an object on the floor of Mr. Daw's private room, which proved to be a small book, having a brass lock in which the key had been left, and where we will also leave it for the present.

Mr. Alderwinkle was summoned, as we have said, to a conference, and was punctual to the appointment. He was more than surprised at first — he was incredulous — when told there was a possibility of obtaining the money for Clendon. Then followed a lengthy conversation about "parties" and "principals," which ended in the Commissioner being obliged to reveal the name of Mr. Oswald Barnard without receiving a similar confidence from the other side: Mr. Daw remaining faithful to his instructions.

When Percy received Mr. Alderwinkle's note the next morning, requesting "an interview on the old business," he was at first disposed to throw it into the waste-paper basket and take no further notice of the communication. Having nothing better to do, however, he changed his mind, and went to the City at the hour appointed.

Mr. Alderwinkle was rather prolix at times on matters of business, and again indulged in a round-about statement of "parties" and "principals," concluding at length with the gratifying information that the money could be obtained on Mr. Clendon's personal security in the form of a bond.

"And now, Mr. Percy," said Alderwinkle — he had a fancy for calling people by their Christian

names — “I think you will say I have earned my commission, and a liberal commission too. It’s not many men who could have done as much for you.”

Percy confessed his obligation, and could not help expressing his surprise that the money could be obtained on such easy terms.

“Well, sir, you see it’s a first-rate concern — a topping concern; and there are people in the world not quite so fond of their money as your good lady seems to be. I consider this a great let out from matrimonial harness for you, Mr. Percy; for, depend upon it, them as loves money when they’re young, gets fonder of it as they grows older, and you’d have found your pin-money harder to come at by-and-by.”

There was something very humiliating in this speech, and Percy reddened as he listened to it, but said nothing.

“You’ll now be your own master,” continued the Commissioner, not noticing the effect of his words, “and if Mrs. C. was Mrs. A., I should not forget her vote of want of confidence.”

“Mrs. Clendon was perfectly justified in what she did,” said Percy, rather warmly.

“Oh, if you’re satisfied, that’s enough,” replied the Commissioner; “but hang me if I could forget it.”

Would Percy in time to come reconsider his verdict of acquittal which he pronounced on Jessie?

The fears of Mr. Alderwinkle that an untimely reformation of Mr. Barnard might put an end to the

partnership negociation, proved to be unhappily premature.

The force of a long indulged habit was too strong for the feeble restraint he had put upon his inclinations during his brief courtship, and his honeymoon waned in a halo that promised anything but a continuance of fine weather.

True, his relapses into debauches were at intervals of days, so long as a feeling of shame that his wife should have a knowledge of his excesses had any influence, but every indulgence lessened this cause of restraint, and in time it ceased altogether.

Flora's first experience of this terrible propensity of her husband produced almost a feeling of terror, and the recurrence of Oswald's intemperate indulgence made her utterly miserable. It was not possible for any man to be more kind or considerate to his wife than Oswald was to Flora when in his sober moments, and even when his reason was confused by strong potations, he only preserved in her presence a sullen silence, never indulging in the violence of language which he had too often used when rebuked by his mother. His promises of amendment for a time were as frequent as his transgressions, but his besetting sin had too long been encouraged, to be discarded by so weak a penitent.

Flora accepted, after many miserable tears, this new affliction, as part of her punishment for the mockery she had consented to take part in, when she accepted Oswald Barnard for a second husband. She had almost brought herself to believe that the

sin of her marriage was venial, because matrimonial bargains were made every day by those who had not the misery of genteel poverty, and the prayers and reproaches of a worldly mother, to excuse such a perversion of God's ordinance. Many such unions — so far as the lookers-on could judge — were productive of quiet living and agreeable communion, but she was destined not to be one of the fortunate transgressors. She had already had to bear with the most cruel treatment by which a bad man could destroy her domestic peace, although "society" is good enough to consider a gentleman in no way degraded by vices which religion condemns, and daily experience shows to be productive of a vast amount of human misery. Honest matrons still open their doors to the profligate, and virtuous maidens permit his familiarity, because society only seeks to amuse itself, and avoid the inconvenience of selecting its associates. And Flora had worn her mask as became the wife of the elegant Mr. Allcroft, who knew society so well that he took no pains to conceal his disregard for solemn vows, or his want of a true gentleman's consideration for the woman he called wife.

The degrading vice of Flora's new husband, was, happily, not so tolerated.

Barnard's City friends were chiefly bachelors. She was not compelled, therefore, to be taken about at the chariot wheels of her conqueror, and made to blush for the transgressions she could not control. There were misery and degradation enough, without that.

She had at first acquired a strong influence over the poor bacchanal, and for some time did not lose it, even when he was at his worst. The knowledge of this power begat in Flora a feeling of pity for the self-made madman, and neither her mother nor her uncle were permitted to speak to her of her husband's infirmity. No — not until her own strong endurance failed her.

END OF VOL. I.

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The first of the persons mentioned in the list is a woman named Mary Ann. She is a native of the County of Cork, Ireland, and is now residing in the County of London, England. She is a widow, and has three children, two of whom are now deceased. She is a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and is a devout worshiper of God. She is a good and virtuous woman, and is well known and respected in the community in which she resides.

2. MARY ANN, 117, ST. MARK'S ST.

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